

# Trans-boundary Cooperation for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Case Studies from the Biosphere Reserves Šumava (Czech Republic), Aggtelek (Hungary) and Babia Góra (Poland)



**Venice Office**  
Regional Bureau for Science  
and Culture in Europe (BRESCE)



**Supported by:****UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (BRESCE)**

Palazzo Zorzi, Castello 4930

30122 Venice (Italy)

Tel. + 39 041 2601511

Fax: + 39 041 5289995

E-mail: [veniceoffice@unesco.org](mailto:veniceoffice@unesco.org)



United Nations  
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**Editor:****Ecological Tourism in Europe (ETE)**

Koblenzer Str. 65

D - 53173 Bonn, Germany

Tel: +49 228 35 90 08, Fax: +49 228 35 90 96

E-mail: [info@oete.de](mailto:info@oete.de)

[www.oete.de](http://www.oete.de)

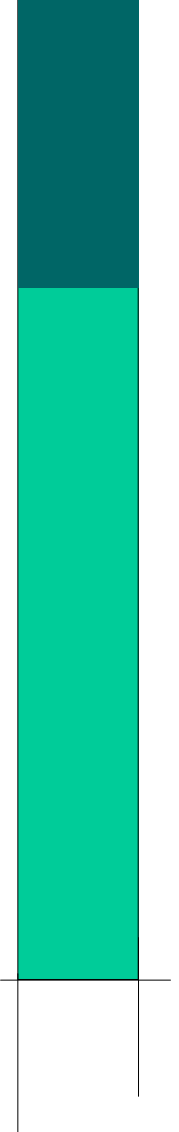
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# **TRANS-BOUNDARY COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS**

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**Ecological Tourism in Europe (ETE)**

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Koblenzer Str. 65  
53173 Bonn / Germany  
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Fax: +49-228-359096
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## **AUTHORS:**

Katrin Gebhard, Stephanie Roth – Ecological Tourism in Europe (ETE)

Gerlinde Geltinger, Róbert Trnka (CHKO Horna Orava-SK), Vladimir Silovsky (Regional Development Agency Šumava), Zsuzsa Tolnay (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve), Judit Sandor, (Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development)

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ANP	Aggtelek National Park (Hungary)
BFNP	Bavarian Forest National Park (Germany)
BPNP	Babia Góra National Park (Poland)
BR	Biosphere Reserve
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
MaB	Man and Biosphere (UNESCO Programme)
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PLA	Protected Landscape Area
SBE	South-West Bohemia EcoRegion
SGB	Stowarzyszenie Gmin Babiogórskich (Polish village association in Babia Góra)
SKNP	Slovensky Kras National Park (Slovakia)
SNC	State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic
ŠNP	Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area (Czech Republic)
ŠRDA	Šumava Regional Development Agency (Czech Republic)
ŠRMA	Šumava Regional Municipality Association (Czech Republic)
TBC	Transboundary Cooperation
TDC	Trilateral Development Concept
TIC	Tourist Information Centre Rožňava (Slovakia)

# 1. Introduction

The project "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity through Sound Tourism Development in Biosphere Reserves in Central and Eastern Europe" aimed at strengthening the protection of globally significant mountain ecosystems in the three Central and Eastern Biosphere Reserves Aggtelek (Hungary), Babia Góra (Poland) and Šumava (Czech Republic). The project has been partly funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and also supported by UNESCO. Its activities were designed as model projects for the implementation of the CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development as well as UNESCO's Man and Biosphere concept.

This is being achieved through the development of new and innovative management systems with a special focus on tourism-related uses of the sites. Awareness raising and capacity building systems have been developed and implemented, to ensure long term sustainable impacts. Tourism model initiatives and activities have been initiated to ensure distribution of returns for conservation purposes as well as to local stakeholders.

All three BRs are located along national state borders and have a counterpart at the other side of the border:



The location of the three areas along national borders together with the countries' recent integration into the European Union (2004) and the Schengen agreement (2008) makes cooperative integrated management essential for the protection of trans-boundary ecological corridors to ensure the conservation of biological diversity and to manage tourism development, which is at an increasing level.

Therefore, the project intended to place the project activities into a trans-boundary context whenever possible, thus contributing to the enhancement and further development of cooperation, not only of the protected areas, but also of other stakeholders such as municipalities, districts and regional governments, NGOs and the private sector.

This study analyses the situation of TBC in the three project regions, illustrating the political and institutional frame as well as the form and quality of the cooperation. Furthermore, it describes the project activities that involved cooperation of cross-border partners and stakeholders, analyses the factor of failure and/or success for TBC and evaluates how the project impacted the cooperation in the three trans-boundary areas.



## 2. Trans-boundary Cooperation in Šumava Biosphere Reserve

### 2.1 Introduction

Situated in the heart of Europe, the Šumava Biosphere Reserve belongs to the Bohemian Forest which is the most extensive continuous forest of Central Europe. In the Šumava Mountains, many biogeographically isolated and relic plant and animal populations survived from the early Holocene.

At the same time, the territory can be seen as a cultural landscape where human activities have been present for centuries – despite the low number of inhabitants of barely 1.500 people living in seven villages inside of the National Park and app. 20.000 in the buffer zone of the Park.

During the last decade, the number of tourists has increased rapidly (almost 2.0 million visitors per year in the National Park) causing the development of accompanying services. Many old neglected buildings have been saved for pensions, cottages, small hotels or other forms of services. Just within the National Park, 500 km of hiking trails and 400 km of bicycle trails have been created. The winter season plays an important role for local tourism businesses. The mild and snow-rich area provides the background for “soft” kinds of winter tourism, e.g. cross-country skiing (300 km of tracks) or walking, but there are also downhill skiing slopes with elevators and cableways close to the border of the National Park.

Currently, there exists no institution for the management of the BR. The administration of the Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area (ŠNP) has been taken over certain responsibilities for the BR without any legal framework at national level. The project fostered the bringing into life of an independent institution for the BR. The ŠNP is one of the most important entities dealing with biodiversity conservation and landscape protection but also with tourism management and development.

The trans-boundary counterpart of the Šumava Biosphere Reserve has been the Bavarian Forest Biosphere Reserve which resigned from its Biosphere Reserve Status in 2006 - the Bavarian Forest National Park (BFNP) and Nature Park continue to be the partners for the Šumava region. The Bavarian Forest National Park is situated in the central part of the Bavarian Forest and embraces about 133 km<sup>2</sup> at the core of the natural landscapes of the Upper Palatinate and Bavarian Forests and the East Bavarian border mountains. The region is known as the largest ‘wilderness’ area of central and southern Europe. Big predators such as the brown bear and the wolf have been extinct here since the 19th century; the lynx, raven and hawk owl (*Strix uralensis*) have now returned. There are no people living in the national park itself. However, some 10.000 people live in communities contiguous to the area. The main commercial sectors are tourism, agriculture and forestry, glass industry and various trades and commerce.

Taken together, these two areas constitute the largest internally cohesive forest region in Central Europe. The cross-border cooperation between Šumava BR and Bavarian

Forest NP has been given a formal basis since 1999. The Czech and the Bavarian Government signed a memorandum, pointing out protection of nature, research, environmental education and public relations as the main topics of an extending and being steadily intensified co-operation.

## 2.2 Framework of TBC

### 2.2.1. Governmental support of the protected area

The governmental support towards the trans-boundary protected area is well different on German and Czech side of the border.

The BFNP receives constant support from the German government. This is due to the fact that the BFNP is regarded as one of the main instruments for strengthening a reasonable and promising development in a once marginal territory along the German-Czech border. This becomes apparent through a general, transparent support of the whole BFNP region.

Unlike BFNP, the support of the ŠNP from the Czech government was not as strong in the past. The NP management saw its main task in the exploitation of the natural resources from the protected area, mainly timber, aiming at generating income to sustain the NP institution. There was no sufficient cooperation with the adjacent villages, and the permanent conflicts between the NP management and the villages led to a crisis in their general relationship.

After recent changes in the NP management in 2004 the situation has been improving. The new national minister of environment fully supports the understanding of the ŠNP as a general motor for regional development in the area, covering not only nature conservation but also the responsible use of the park's natural resources for the benefit of both, NP management and the local population.

However, political changes in the national government might easily endanger the approach of the current NP administration as the ministry is able to intervene in the NP's management through ad-hoc decisions and the general respect for the management plan of the national park is low. The NP administration has to deal with several difficult tasks and situations - the elaboration of a new management plan is due, the damages of the windstorm Kyril have to be handled, the Schengen agreement demands new regulations of access etc. As there is much concern about the NP's work in the region and support of stakeholders is weak, the support of the national government is a crucial aspect for the success of the NP administration.

### 2.2.2. Regional support of the protected area

On the German side of the trans-boundary protected area, the regional and local level generally supports the policy of the Bavarian government regarding the support of the BFNP. The representatives of the local governments follow the policy of the Bavarian government and assist the BFNP management, through corresponding decision-making and cooperation.

The people living in the villages within the BFNP managed to find satisfying ways of cooperation and benefit from the NP, e.g. in terms of tourism development or infrastructure improvements. There is only one village situated in the new part of the BFNP (after the extension in 1997) that does not agree with the policy of the BFNP. This village received quite a strong support from other opponents of the NP management and even from members of the Bavarian Parliament. However, thanks to the enormous engagement of the Bavarian government and local representatives, a solution has been found recently – i.a., the date of the area's transition towards fully non-intervention-management has been shifted to 2017/2027.

The regional and local representatives in the Czech Republic, in fact fight in many fields for competences with the Ministry of Environment. The general regional support for the ŠNP is relatively weak, the cooperation affected by a lack of mutual understanding. Villages within the ŠNP have been suffering from a lack of development assistance. Neither the Czech government, nor the NP administration took on responsibility for their well-being. However, there have been several attempts to find a common strategy (strategic documents, common vision, zonation). Unfortunately, these attempts were taken as an opportunity by various stakeholders to form a strong opposition against the national park. Partly this was also due to the approach of the NP which lacked the willingness to really involve local people and to consider their interests. Therefore, the attempts failed to build up mutual trust and a common understanding of the values of nature protection. The new ŠNP management tries to find a new approach to solve at least the most crucial aspects of coexistence between local people and the interests of nature protection in the Šumava region.

### 2.2.3. EUROREGION – Key step towards cooperation

In 1994, the EUREGIO<sup>1</sup> Bavarian Forest - Šumava - Unterer Inn was created as a trilateral association in the three countries Germany, Austria and Czech Republic. The Euregio consists of the public associations formed in the three countries: In Šumava, this is the EUROREGION Šumava, the EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald - Böhmischer Wald - Unterer Inn in Bavaria/Germany and the regional management association Regionalmanagement Mühlviertel Oberösterreich in Austria. Altogether, these three regions create one trans-boundary unit. The overall task of the EUREGIO is to coordinate and improve joint approaches in trans-boundary cooperation. In this context, EUREGIO deals with the following issues: infrastructure development in the border region; development of a joint development strategy; exchange of information; trans-boundary cooperation in fields of economy and transport, employment, tourism, agriculture and forestry, ecology and protection of nature, education, sport and culture. A special committee was created to take care of those topics.

The EUROREGION Šumava is an association of communities and cities, including their corporations and other legal subjects, specialized on international cooperation with communities, cities and administrative districts of borderline regions. The EUROREGION Šumava territory includes the districts of Domazlice, Klatovy, Prachatice, Cesky Krumlov and Strakonice. The main control body consists of high-ranking representatives from regional governments (South and West Bohemia regions), mayors of big cities and smaller settlements and other regional representatives. Today, more than 125 members create a very good base for both, regional and trans-boundary cooperation. At least once a year representatives of the EUROREGION Šumava meet regularly at a plenary session, aiming to solve concrete problems of cooperation under the roof of EUROREGION Šumava.

The municipalities of the districts Freistadt, Perg, Rohrbach and Urfahr and their surroundings represent the Austrian partners. On the German side EUROREGION includes the districts Cham, Deggendorf, Freyung-Grafenau, Passau, Regen, Rottal-Inn, Straubing-Bogen and the cities of Passau and Straubing. Another 25 members are made up by NGOs, voluntary associations, working groups and the private sector. Comparing all the three partner regions of EUROREGION, the involvement of NGOs and especially of the private sector is extended the most at the German side. Both, German and Czech side have a regular office to support the daily work of EUROREGION/EuRegio. The Austrian partner supports their work, but does not run an own office.

<sup>1</sup> Euregio or Euroregion is the term for trans-boundary regions in Europe which were formed mainly out of economic interests to foster trans-boundary cooperation and to support the socio-economic and cultural development in the participating regions. The term goes back to the convention of the European Council of 1980 but is not defined clearly. Therefore, the Euregions or Euroregions are formed in the frame of different legal forms such as public cooperation, private institutions or loose cooperation without legally defined status.

The first document on the way towards a common future for all the three partners in the region was the Trilateral Development Concept (TDC), which lists concrete measures and suggestions for TBC projects. This document is focused on the following topics:

- Nature and landscape biodiversity and the relation of these issues to agriculture, tourism and recreation
- Forestry and agriculture
- Transport, focused on the trans-boundary aspect
- Infrastructure and environmentally friendly products

The TDC was included into the MaB International Pilot Projects list. Representatives of subject regions officially signed it in June 1994. The TDC represents a widely used basic strategy document for trans-boundary cooperation in the region, with its potential still not being fully utilised.

Summarizing, the main tools for trans-boundary cooperation on the regional level are national and international grant programs, common trans-boundary development planning, the joint support of trans-boundary projects and further cooperation in all other kinds of activities.

#### 2.2.4. The Šumava Regional Development Agency (ŠRDA)

One of the most important steps for the Czech side on its way towards real trans-boundary cooperation was the creation of the ŠUMAVA REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY ASSOCIATION (RMA, today 37 members) in 1993. The goal of the RMA is to foster regional development and living conditions in a cross-border context, thinking of Šumava as one region including the German and Austrian parts.

In 1995 the RMA (supported by the Centre for International Help) received a grant from the Global Technical Assistance Facility Programme (GTAF) to establish a service agency with the goal of supporting regional activities. In 1996, the ŠUMAVA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (ŠRDA) o.p.s. (a public utility institution) was set up as a non-profit organisation engaged with the management of the EUROREGION.

The main activities related to the topic of trans-boundary cooperation that the ŠRDA has engaged in since its creation, are:

- Management of PHARE CBC Programme (1998-2003)
- Management of Interreg IIIA - Dispositional Fund (2004-2007)
- Management of grant schemes (2002-3)
- Development regional studies on the topic of tourism, dealing with trans-boundary cooperation
- Coordination of maintenance of ski tracks (some of them were as well trans-boundary)
- Information service for the region (Sumava, RIS)
- EU project Ecos Ouverture, Ecoregion – regional information system (in cooperation with Austria, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Czech Republic)
- Programs SAPARD, ISPA
- Cooperation with other agencies to support trans-boundary cooperation in the region
- Management of grant scheme of GEF project
- EU structural assistance (2007-13)

Being the only service organization in the whole territory of the Šumava Biosphere Reserve, ŠRDA is the leading regional service development organization. In spite of the fact that competitive agencies founded by regional governments in České Budějovice and Plzeň aspire to get stronger control over the region, the advantage of a direct approach to local potential users of EU funds stays on the side of the ŠRDA, thus creating benefits for the whole region.

### 2.2.5. National park management on Czech and German side

The Bavarian Forest National Park was established in 1970 as the first national park in Germany. Its enlargement to present state, covering more than 24.000 hectares, was done in 1997. The Šumava National Park was declared in 1991 and is the largest Czech national park with a territory of 69.000 ha. Both NPs belong to the IUCN category II, however, the establishment of a trans-boundary NP seems to be not very likely for the nearer future.

#### Similar roles, different stories

Both NPs were created to protect the outstanding natural values of the Bohemian Forest. While the BFNP was declared on a territory actually without any permanent settlements, the Czech approach calculated with permanent settlements, seven villages in total, inside of the NP.

According to Bavarian law it is necessary to devote at least 50% of a NP to natural processes. After the big storm in 1983 and an initial struggle to find a proper way of managing the damaged forest, it was decided that leaving some parts of the NP forest without any influence of man was the best solution for nature. The massive outbreak of the bark beetle in the 1990s did not cause any substantial changes in the management policy of the BFNP. The enlargement of the BFNP area in 1997 meant a temporary shift in the park's management strategy (regarding the bark beetle), but the goal to unify the management of the new with the old part of the NP until 2017 has persisted (as a compromise that considers the interests of local inhabitants, the postponement of the interim period to 2027 is being discussed). However, the goal of having 50% non-intervention-area in the NP is still to be reached as soon as possible.

The ŠNP was declared an area which shall serve the purpose of protecting natural processes as well as the typical cultural landscape of Šumava. This twofold goal was possible to obtain due to the large area of the ŠNP and its system of zoning. Currently, 135 patches of core zone are covering only twelve percent of the total area of the NP – an allocation dating back to the mid of the 1990s. This zoning represents one of the main obstacles for the proper management of the NP area and trans-boundary management attempts. Generally, management in the area of the ŠNP is largely perceived as a proactive management influencing nature, i.e. it severely interferes in the natural processes of the park territory. Especially concerning forestry, the management strategy envisages the creation of “new”, man-made forests. However, this forestry approach is currently being revised and a new zoning model could be used as a tool to reach a change in management towards more non-intervention-areas.

#### Official agreement as a basis

An official memorandum of mutual cooperation between the BFNP and the ŠNP was signed in 1998 and amended in 2005. The three core matters of the memorandum are nature protection, recreation/education/public relations and research/monitoring. The amendment from 2005 confirms the willingness for future cooperation and describes more in detail the main goals of protecting natural processes. Unfortunately, the Czech municipalities did not accept the appendix – a fact partly caused by the insufficient notification and discussion in the preparation process. Both NP administrations had different views on how to reach both, a common vision and a strategy of nature protection in the trans-boundary region in the past. The memorandum is an official agreement between the parks but it lacks the support of the local communities and therefore the implementation of any kind of measures, e.g. the fostered conservation of the wilderness zone, is always endangered by the strong opposition of the local stakeholders. The same failure affected the attempt to sign an agreement about the so-called “Wild Heart of Europe” - the agreement had to be postponed due to the objection of local communities which had not been involved in the decisions about the idea in an appropriate way.

### Common approach

The orientation of the ŠNP management changed in 2004 with a change of the director – and a new orientation towards the protection of natural processes was declared. The next director appointed in 2007 confirmed this new course and announced a strategy which will strive to achieve a management which brings both NPs closer together. Following his announcement at a meeting with the director of the BFNP, it will be necessary first of all to prepare a new management plan for the Czech side of the trans-boundary area which will better reflect the publicly declared orientation to natural processes. At the same time, the new strategy will have to provide support for sustainable development in the region. A new bilateral declaration of both NPs can be a possible next step in seeking for better cooperation between the parks.

Another driving force for the trans-boundary cooperation could be the management institution for the Šumava Biosphere Reserve which is planned to be established (a process initiated in the frame of this project).

### 2.2.6. The coming into force of the Schengen agreement

Free access across the border is something that can be hardly compared with any other changes affecting tourism in the region in the last decades. However, NPs represent areas of such an importance for biodiversity conservation that a specific approach is necessary. The expectations that the open borders will foster regional development, i.a. through tourism, are high. The coming into force of the agreement in the region has fostered the motivation to engage in trans-boundary cooperation not only within the NP administrations but also within the local communities. The main goal is to find a real common system of public use of both NPs which ensures that the loss of biodiversity does not increase due to the bigger pressures in the areas of the formerly closed border.

What can be considered as a certain threat for the vulnerable nature of the NPs, can be a challenge for both broader regions. It's a challenge for new positive projects solving common problems (cross-border public traffic system working on the principles of regional tickets, common information materials, common nature and culture projects etc.). The creation of the "Wild heart of Europe" could be one of them. All these projects cannot be implemented without full involvement of the local people.

## 2.3 Forms and quality of TBC

### Deep roots of cooperation

Apart from the fact that the South-West frontier of the former Czech Kingdom was always rather restless, trans-boundary contacts of people living in the region stretched along the Czech, Bavarian and Austrian border have been absolutely natural for centuries. Only World War II violently broke up common relations and the Iron Curtain was erected. After 1989, when the Eastern Block had been unravelled, the situation changed again and cooperation began to start anew.

### Making an umbrella

Official treaties on cooperation between the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria created an umbrella and the basis for cooperation on both, regional and local level. New structures, necessary for the creation of meaningful cooperation were created mostly in bottom-up approaches. Institutional gaps that existed on Czech side were quickly filled.

The trans-boundary cooperation at the level of regional governments (České Budějovice and Plzeň) is based on mutual and regular exchange of information with relevant partners in Germany and Austria. In the centre of interest stands the mutual

assistance in developing key infrastructure projects (e.g. highways, train corridors) and bigger cultural events (e.g. presentation days/weeks, festivals).

Cooperation at the local, municipal level is much more concrete, focused mainly on mutual visits, common cultural events as well as partnerships and meetings – most of them being of rather informal character. Anyhow, the local cooperation also is based on the official partnership under the Euregion/Euroregion.

Leaders of cooperation at the local level are mainly local mayor and municipality representatives. Local associations play a crucial role. The most important in this aspect are associations of firemen, sportsmen, musicians, choirs or organisations related to church. Generally speaking, there are many people and institutions seeking to engage in trans-boundary cooperation in all three countries.

The majority of the projects implemented until today consists of “soft” measures; investment (roads, buildings) just starts now thanks to EU funds. However, small projects seem to prevail as a key subject of future cooperation. Activities common for all partnerships are regular meetings of local representatives, mutual participation in events such as sport tournaments, trips, cultural events such as exhibitions, local celebrations, concerts, services and a general cooperation of local associations.

Specific for the region is a common effort of municipalities located close to the state border to open new border crossings which is still relevant even after the coming into force of the Schengen agreement because of the fact that large areas are under strict nature protection, thus preventing common crossing of the border in these areas.

The table lists a sample of cross-border activities and the communities that participated in these activities.

Czech Republic	Bavaria	Austria	Coop. since	Activities above common scope (mentioned above)
Horní Plana (2 339)	Wegscheid (1 536)	Kollerschlag (1 536)	2004	Annual common municipality meetings Common organization of Three country Crosstriathlon
Horní Plana	Breitenberg (2 300)	Neureichenau (4 673) Schwarzenberg (692)	2004	Common celebration of Adalbert Stifter anniversary 2005
Horní Plana		Ulrichsberg (3 073)	1981	Games on the border (each to years)
Vyší Brod (2 499)		Bad Leonfelden (3 850)	2004	Intensive mutual support of fire brigades Common cross border tourist trails
Kaplice (7 000)		Freistadt (9 000)	2004	Wandering on Millstone path
Frymburk (191)		SchHaslach an der Mühl (2 570)	1998	Meeting of people from forcible resettlement
Zelnavá (132)		Klafter am Hochficht (1 130)	1984	Meeting of people from forcible resettlement New chapel, small museum
Dolní Dvůr (1 100)		Leopoldschlag (1 262)	1986	20-years old contacts of schools Common hunting activities
Prácheň (12 000)		Mauthausen (4 850)	1991	Meeting three times a year
Prácheň	Grainet (500)		1996	Golden Path large cultural project Cooperation of schools
Horní Dvůr (520)		Rainbach (2 940)	2004	Cross border trail Cooperation of schools

				Common maintenance of ski routes
Cerna v Posumavi (829)		Schlägl (1 500)	1996	Fire brigades cooperation Waste disposal cooperation
Predni Vyton (191)		Schöneegg (555)	1991	Mutual support of fire brigades Cooperation of kinder gardens
Zelezna Ruda (1 690))	Bayerisch Eisenstein (1312)		2005	Common project planning (one town)
Klatovy (23 000)	Cham (17 300)		1993	Marketing activities
Kdyne (5 093)	Eschlkam (3 500)		1994	Bavarian-Czech Week (sport and culture) Bavarian-Czech Days for cycling
Dlouha Ves (800)	Frauenau (2 991)		2000	Cooperation of schools
Vimperk (8 200)	Freyung (7 136)		2003	Marketing activities Cross border wandering
Domazlice (11 069)	Furth im Wald (9 378)		1990	Cross border wandering Cross border run Open-Air-opera Cooperation of schools
Kaspersker Hory (1 594)	Grafenau (8 985)		1991	Mutual visits, cooperation of municipalities
Susice (11 500)	Grafenwiesen (1 654)		1998	Match museums cooperation
Cesky Krumlov (14 000)	Hauzenberg (12 400)		1992	Annual festival (sport, culture) Day without borders (for disabled)
Besiny (820)	Lalling (1 600)		2003	Mutual visits, school cooperation
Kvilda (172)	Mauth-Fünsterau (2 446)		1997	Cooperation in tourism management
Borova Lada (277)	Mauth-Fünsterau		1992	Cooperation in tourism management
Hartmanice (1 143)	Rinchnach (3 300)		2004	Language exchange School cooperation
Stachy (2 100)	Ruderting (3 150)		2006	Celebration of partnership School cooperation
Vlachovo Březí (1 640)	St. Oswald/Ridelhütte (3 169)		2003	Common cooperation (five common events yearly)
Horni Plana	Tiefenbach (6 700)		2000	Coordination of cultural events
Svihov (1 800)	Traitsching (4 100)		2001	Local policy experience exchange
Prachatice	Waldkirchen (10 650)		1996	School cooperation Golden Path large cultural project
Klenci pod Cerchovem (1 270)	Waldmünchen (7 400)		1990	Common action association "Cerchov" Nordic walking footpaths



				Common days
	Sonnen (1 500)	Atzesberg (526)	1997	Sport and cultural events Yearly social events
	Julbach im Rottal (2 350)	Julbach ( 1 654)	2003	Mutual visit at events
	Mitterkirchen (2 084)	Mitterkirchen (1 793)	1978	Mutual visits at events Financial support (flood 2002)
	Wegscheid (5 812)	Nebelberg (643)	Very old	New bridge over the border brook Meetings at bier (men and women)
	Lindberg (2 412)	Puchenu (4 647)	1987	Folk music without border (2004)

## 2.4 TBC in the frame of the project

### 2.4.1. Train in motion

The extension and improvement of the trans-boundary cooperation between the protected areas in the field of tourism management was one aim of the project “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity through Sound Tourism Development in Biosphere Reserves in Central and Eastern Europe”. However, this was not the first project of that kind in the Šumava region and the project activities related to TBC did not set off from zero. Cooperation was already running and some basic steps were already done (e.g. official agreements, topical working groups, running cross-border projects, grant schemes, unofficial contacts etc. as described in the previous chapter).

Nevertheless, the project vitally improved the performance of the TBC especially with regards to tourism issues. Many of the project’s tourism-related activities had positive effects on both, Czech and Bavarian side of the common region, in particular regarding the trans-boundary aspects.

### 2.4.2. Bottom up approach

At the initial phase of the project a compilation of priorities and potential project activities had been elaborated together with the local stakeholders. This list reflected a strong demand for attracting foreign visitors to the area and for fostering cooperation with people on the other side of the common mountains. So, several activities were already from the beginning intentionally focused on trans-boundary cooperation, while some more activities planned to be implemented on the Czech side revealed their trans-boundary effect within the course of the project.

### 2.4.3. Positive effects of the project

The work on trans-boundary topics was mainly covered by small-scale and concrete project activities such as the establishment of a common visitor information system with the goal to improve the mutual exchange of information directly in the field. Another example is the creation of a common information system based on boards which have been erected in more than fifteen places along the border. In this context, consultations with partners from both, German and Austrian side, were taking place in order to guarantee the best information for guests coming from the respectively other side of the border.

Training courses for tourist guides in the Šumava Mountains started with an information exchange between colleagues from BFNP and ŠNP. Some experiences from similar courses organized in the past on the German side have been adapted and the

course was arranged partly as cross-border events. Even three German native speakers living on the Czech side of Šumava took part in the training course, which can be regarded as another side effect of trans-boundary cooperation – in particular as these three people would like to cooperate with the ŠNP in the future.

Some small projects supported by the small grant scheme realised in the frame the project have also had trans-boundary effects. Most common was for example the production of bilingual information leaflets for trans-boundary topics, e.g. for cross-border trails, or the advertisement of accommodation and services as a package.

In the context of searching for a more effective implementation of the Šumava BR, one of the most important outputs of the project is that it brought forth a discussion about the topic of trans-boundary cooperation between the two BRs/NPs. The project gave new incentives to the management of the ŠNP and thus encouraged the discussion of future possibilities of cooperation with the German side.

The main outcome of the project (the Strategy of Sound Tourism Development in the Šumava Mts.) is widely accepted in the region. It is planned to use this strategic document in the frame of the work on a trans-boundary tourism management approach together with partners from Germany and Austria.

The principal objectives of the strategy are to react to new stimuli in tourism emerging at various levels – local, nation-wide as well as international, to involve political changes ensuing from the EU membership of the Czech Republic and very recently from the country's accession to the Schengen agreement. It was necessary to provide the regional tourism organizations with the concrete guidelines for destination management which refers to the whole Šumava region. The strategy strives to form a compromise between entrepreneurial activities and environment protection within the area of Šumava.

One of the main actors that is crucial for the implementation of the strategy is the RDA Šumava, officially designated by the national Czech Tourism Agency as a regional destination management body and that deals with trans-boundary cooperation as well. The ŠRDA submitted an application to EU funds for a project aiming at developing the destination management within a trans-boundary framework from the very beginning.

Tourism in the Šumava region has been developing extremely rapid in last several years. Expectations revealed at the beginning of the project were overcome in many aspects. Shortly before the project started, the Czech Republic had become an EU member state which induced a lot of political, economic and structural changes. During the project the Czech Republic joined the Schengen agreement. The Šumava NP Administration has shifted its policy towards nature conservation and aims to form one natural nature unit with the Bavarian Forest National Park. At the global stage, questions of global warming and terrorisms have started to influence the tourism business. Naturally, the project could not solve all actual problems occurring in the region. However, with its scope of activities (planning activities, training courses, direct support of small projects through the grant scheme, activities fostering the cultural heritage conservation etc.) it initiated significant long term activities in the cross-border region. To implement activities, cross-border cooperation has been necessary and proved to bring positive results. The project itself could hardly deal with all the problems caused by the rapid development pushed namely by regional and local governments. Nevertheless, it has demonstrated sustainable alternatives to some investments that only aim at short-term benefit generation. The project initiated a platform for regional discussions about the topics of future (tourism) development in the Šumava Mountains. It gave many stakeholders that, due to their position, are normally not directly involved in decision-making processes the opportunity to express their opinion to questions of future regional development. The tourism strategy which has been developed together with the RDA Šumava to a certain extent points out the importance of biodiversity protection in the region. For the first time monitoring and evaluation criteria in relation to biodiversity were incorporated to document of similar scope in the Šumava region. Furthermore, the project has supported a new view on the concept of biosphere re-

serve. The municipalities of the region see it now as an opportunity to have a bigger stake in development and responsibility for "their" region.

#### **2.4.4. Lessons learned from the project**

The implementation of the project revealed a number of concrete obstacles at the local level preventing an effective cooperation. On the other hand, new opportunities which were still not in use have been discovered in the course of the project.

As a lesson learned for future projects it can be stated that the focus on concrete small project that support the idea of TBC could be much more fruitful than concentrating on the wide scope of TBC as a whole. The experiences obtained while realising such small projects can be used when dealing with the bigger frame of the TBC, also with regards to the participation in the creation of a comprehensive strategy for the TBC in the region.

### **2.5 Obstacles for TBC**

#### **2.5.1. Language barrier**

Even now, seventeen years after the political change in Eastern Europe, the lack of language skills was identified as one of main obstacles for common daily cooperation. In particular on the Czech side, the language barrier is a severe problem. This is even true for managers who are in other respects very successful. The result is very often a decrease of interest in cross-border activities. Very few people on the German and Austrian side speak Czech, and on the Czech side people speaking fluently German are also quite rare. The language barrier still persists but new generations communicate much easier than previous as English becomes more and more important in education on both sides.

#### **2.5.2. Communication deficits**

There is lot of information channels in the trilateral region but in fact all of them are focused on local topics. A well functioning way of communication within and a shared source of information for the whole cross-border region which would be jointly administered by the representatives of the three protected areas still do not exist. Independent web-pages for the individual PAs do exist but there is neither a common server nor a good way of inter-linking the separate websites. As a result, also for visitors of the area the access to information is often rather limited. The activities in the frame of the project have been likewise affected by this lack of information and communication. The easiest and most likely way to overcome this gap seems to be an improvement of the EUREGIO webpages.

The internet pages of both NP administrations allow an access to pages of neighbouring NP webpages; however, there is a lack of quality translation information necessary for visitors. There is only basic information on both NP internet pages; information on trans-boundary cooperation is missing totally. Common events for visitors (common celebration of NP days, guided tours through both areas etc.) are still not being realised. Regarding these activities, commercial organizations are much ahead compared to the administrations.

#### **2.5.3. Lack of strategic regional planning**

The lack of strategic documents for the region, in particular of a transparent and common regional strategy was identified as one of the main obstacles for the effective implementation of trans-boundary cooperation.

However, the partners in the regions have a clear vision of how to cooperate and they expressed their will to strengthen efforts in this context. Generally, the German partners constantly show bigger interest than the partners on the Czech side. In the course of searching for a common strategy for the region it is agreed that trans-boundary aspects need to be taken much more into account than they have been so far.

The elaboration of a strategy of sound tourism for the Šumava BR as an output of the project could partly fill this gap and thus contributed to the establishment of a regional strategy in the field of tourism in the future.

## 2.6 Recommendations

- The development of the strategy of sound tourism for the Šumava BR should be taken as an example of a management planning approach that is based on the involvement of stakeholders and trans-boundary partners.
- Efforts should be continued to establish a trans-boundary national park with a joint tourism management.
- The EUREGIO and the ŠUMAVA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY should be involved as main leaders in tourism development. Biodiversity conservation should be incorporated into their strategies and projects to underline the uniqueness of the region and the importance of nature protection.
- The already existing cross-border activities of the two national parks such as the common ranger programme, training of guides etc. should be intensified.
- The cooperation of the national parks with the private sector regarding trans-boundary issues of tourism development should be enhanced (especially at the Czech side), e.g. the establishment of a national park partners programme.
- The support of the regional governments and the private sector for the many small scale activities and projects at local level, e.g. the establishment of a cross-border public transport system which at present is mainly brought forward by the NP administration, should be enhanced.
- The idea of establishing a trans-boundary PA should be promoted at events in the region and surrounding areas (EUROPARC in Český Krumlov, the MaB committees, and exhibitions at regional or national level).

## 3. Trans-boundary Cooperation in Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve

### 3.1 Introduction

The Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve is situated in a vast Karst area which belongs to the southern limestone foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Due to the variety of the Karst landscape and the climatic conditions, a great variety of ecosystems can be found - different types of oak and beech forests, rock steppes and open rock grasslands - going along with a rich diversity of fauna. The Karst caves that stretch out over more than 500 km are a unique habitat where many rare and endemic species.

The total population of the two villages within the Biosphere Reserve mount up to 1.000 people. Most of them are working in forestry, agriculture and livestock farming. Recently more and more are also engaged in the tourism business. The social structure shows an aging population and a high unemployment rate.

The main attractions of the region are the caves with the tradition of visiting the Baradla cave being over 100 years old. About 200.000 people visit the area annually but tourism is concentrated in time and space: 70% of all visitors come during summer, usually visiting only the most frequented sites, around the entrances of Baradla Cave. This situation leads to an overloading of the carrying capacities in the adjacent villages, while the tourism potential of other sites remains unexploited. Most visitors spend only a couple of hours in the area, but recently there has been a little increase in overnight stays.

There is no independent administration for the Biosphere Reserve and the task is under the responsibility of the Aggtelek National Park (ANP). The territories of BR and NPs are nearly identical (covering 19.947 ha) which does not correspond well with the concept of BRs - this is the reason why the NP administration usually involves also the almost 50 settlements surrounding the NP when dealing with tourism issues and regional development activities. The National Park is the largest employer of the region, but for certain jobs requiring high qualification, a number of people are employed from other parts of the country.

The counterpart of the Aggtelek BR and NP in the Slovak Republic is the Slovensky Kras Biosphere Reserve which also includes a NP. Located in the southern part of the Slovak Republic, the Karst landscape comprises of almost the complete range of the Karst phenomena of temperate climates. The Slovensky Kras Biosphere Reserve covers an area of more than 75.000 ha with the Slovensky Kras National Park (SKNP) in its centre.

Caves in the Karst region in the Slovak Republic and Hungary were included into the UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage in 1995.

Before the project started in 2004, trans-boundary cooperation already took place between the two BRs in form of regular meetings, a UNDP-program on environmentally friendly rural development in the SKNP and the ANP. Further, common manage-

ment strategies and practices of the two PAs were being planned. Trans-boundary cooperation with the SKNP is further being realized through common scientific projects and in the field of tourism. However, the TBC needed to be enhanced significantly, especially in the field of tourism. Due to the absence of a common strategy for tourism development, uneven focus of tourism development can be seen. Slovensky Kras does not have sufficient tourism facilities and services, thus placing the Aggtelek National Park in the position of a quasi tour operator, which results in different attitudes towards tourism development on the Hungarian side.

## 3.2 Framework of TBC

### 3.2.1. Hungary-Slovakia Territorial Co-operation Programme 2007- 2013

The territorial co-operation programme focuses on the further increase of integration of the border region mainly in the fields of economic and human cooperation, cross-border environment, nature protection and accessibility. The former is to be achieved by means of development of a common business infrastructure, a labour market information system, co-operation in the field of R&D (research and development), supporting of clusters; educational, social, cultural co-operation, developing partnership, project management capacity building and the development of tourism. Cross-border environment, nature protection and accessibility development concentrate on environment and nature protection, and co-operation in small-scale transport infrastructure and information infrastructure.

### 3.2.2. The intergovernmental agreement to enhance trans-boundary co-operation

The basis for the transnational working group established in 1999 (1999/17 international agreement about the cooperation of the Government of the Republic of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Slovakia in the field of environment and nature conservation) is the frame cooperation agreement between the Republic of Hungary and Republic of Slovakia signed 19 March 1995 that aims at enhancing the good neighbourhood and friendship between the two countries. A commission was established which meets annually (or upon request).

The main fields of cooperation are:

- environmental policies
- status monitoring, data collection
- investigation of activities with potential cross-border impacts
- environmental education and awareness raising
- research and development, prevention
- health and environment
- climate protection, environment and energy
- nature and landscape protection (with special focus on Aggtelek NP – CHKO (now NP) Slovak Karst; Duna-Ipoly NP – Burda, Ipel region; and Karancs-Medves LPA & Zemplén LPA – CHKO Cerova Vrchovina)
- protection of elements of environment
- waste management
- integration of regional environmental policies

The topics that Aggtelek NPD and the Slovak Karst NPD are particularly connected to are:

- NATURA 2000
- Harmonisation of National Ecological Networks
- Monitoring and protection of large carnivores
- LIFE Nature projects – Saker (*Falco cherrug*) project
- Cross-border Ramsar sites

- Elaboration of cross-border nature and landscape protection concept
- Protection and management of the World Heritage Aggtelek and Slovak Karst caves
- Promotion and awareness raising
- Ecological catastrophe watch and alert

### 3.2.3. Interreg programmes

The latest Interreg programme was available 2004-2006 as an instrument of financing bi- or trilateral trans-boundary projects between Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine (HUSKUA).

The fields of action of this programme were:

- Priority 1: Trans-boundary social and economic cooperation (1.1. trans-boundary business cooperation, 1.2. institutional cooperation, 1.3. micro-projects of local communities)
- Priority 2: Trans-boundary environmental protection and traffic (2.1. trans-boundary coordination of environmental policies and related small scale investments, 2.2. Crossborder cooperation for nature conservation, 2.3. development of small scale traffic and telecommunication infrastructure)

### 3.2.4. EuroRegion organisations

- **Sajó-Rima Euro régió / Slané Rimavské Euro región:** This organisation was founded in 2000. The target area covers the settlements along river Sajó and Rima (125 in Hungary, and 211 in Slovakia – 336 in total), affecting almost 1 million citizens on 6000 square kilometres. The mission of the organisation is to implement sustainable development through harmonizing the social, economic and environmental aspects, carrying out preparatory action to the European integration. Main fields of actions:
  - development and implementation of joint economic, agricultural, industrial, commercial, service and tourism plans, programmes;
  - harmonised, environmentally sound development of infrastructures and transportation systems;
  - joint planning of land use, use of catchments, surface waters, water bases and protected areas and management;
  - spatial planning, elaboration of joint management plans built on joint plans, detailed action plans and impact assessments;
  - harmonized cooperation of state institutions and civil relations;
  - broadening the relations and joint actions of education, cultural, recreational, sport, research and innovative institutes;
  - cooperation in the field of environment protection, nature conservation, forestry, water management and emergency services;
  - cooperation of healthcare and social institutions.
- **The Karszt Euroregion/Euroregion Kras** was founded by the Domica Micro-region Civil Society, Bódva Union (bringing together 42 settlements from the vicinity of Košice) and by the Galyaság Village Association in Hungary. It focuses mostly on rural development, especially village tourism.

### 3.2.5. National programmes with trans-boundary potential or scope

The National Civil Fund (NCA) of Hungary was launched in 2005, with the aim of reinforcing the activities of non-governmental organisations in various fields. The fund uses the “1%” of personal income tax left in the budget without defined purpose. The fund has a number of regional and thematic colleges; one of them is responsible for International Civil Contacts and European Integration. Due to the historical back-

ground of Hungary, the major part of this international fund is dedicated to the cross-border cooperation of Hungarian organisations with Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Austria and last, but not least, Slovakia. Networking, joint programmes, newspapers, brochures etc. can be financed from this source.

### 3.3 Forms and quality of TBC

#### 3.3.1. Local organisations of TBC

The most important organisations that are involved in TBC are:

- Governmental organisations on the Hungarian side:
  - Aggtelek National Park Directorate, Jósvalfó (scope of activity: regional – surface and subterranean assets)
- Governmental organisations on the Slovakian side :
  - Slovak Karst National Park Directorate, Brzotín (scope of activity: regional – surface assets)
  - Slovak Cave Management Directorate, Liptovský Mikuláš (scope of activity: national – subterranean assets)
- Municipalities: approx. 100 municipalities are related to the BRs together on the two sides of the border
- Universities, scientific institutions: Although both BR's are in work relation with several institutions, the two most important ones are the University of Debrecen, Hungary and the East Slovakia Regional Museum, Košice. These two have been and are involved in trans-boundary research and monitoring programmes.
- NGOs: approx. 10-15 NGOs of various size, capacity and scope of activities, cross border activities are present in case of few ones:
  - Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development Foundation, Miskolc, Hungary
  - Gömör-Torna Foundation, Jósvalfó, Hungary
  - Galyaság Village Association, Hungary
  - Gömör Youth Association, Slovakia
  - Slovak Karst Tourism Association, Slovakia
  - Kras Euroregion, Slovakia
  - Association for the Development of Rural Tourism in the Zádiel Valley and Surrounding, Zádiel, Slovakia

#### 3.3.2. History of cooperation

The state border divides one geological, bio-geographical unit, and since the period prior to WW I also two historic counties (Gömör and Abaúj-Torna). This division had aftermaths that still influence the situation of today's socio-economic environment and nature conservation. The border line dividing this unit is 55 km long, and the area is over 50.000 ha (Aggtelek NP 20.187 ha, Slovak Karst NP 36.170 ha).

The two protected areas were established in order to protect the outstanding natural values:

- The underground world of the Slovak Karst with the adjoining Aggtelek Karst is one of the finest and most complex Karst developments at medium altitude in the temperate zone because of its more than 1200 caves of different origin, morphology and with many kinds of speleothems.



- This extended underground world provides the habitat for more than 500 species of troglobite, troglophile and troglaxene animals including endemic species as well as species first described from this region.
- The characteristic Karst morphology accompanying the underground world offers a unique possibility to study the relationship between the surface and the subsurface Karst formations.
- Due to the transitional position of the region, it is in the overlap of several different bio-geographical influences. This fact combined with the microclimatic characteristics of the Karst relief resulted in an extremely high habitat and species diversity. The relatively small area comprises several faunal and floral elements of completely different ecological demands.
- The great variety of ecosystems provides habitats for several rare and threatened animal and plant species. In several cases this Karst area serves as a refuge for species, and there are biotopes which have been fragmented, destroyed or disappeared in other parts of Europe, as a consequence of different land-use practices.

Nature conservation has almost a 100 years long history in the region, but after some parallel running initiatives (establishment of PLAs, BR status) the first common international nomination and acknowledgement came with the World Heritage status in 1995 (the caves of the Aggtelek and the Slovak Karst). The Ramsar site nomination, considering that the Baradla-Domica cave system as one, was to be a common nomination, but finally the same year separate action was taken.

Major nature conservation dates:

<b>Aggtelek National Park</b> Aggteleki Nemzeti Park	<b>Slovak Karst National Park</b> Národný park Slovenský Kras	Common nomination	Separate nomination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1978 Protected Landscape Area</li> <li>• 1979 Biosphere Reserve</li> <li>• 1985 National Park</li> <li>• 1995 World Heritage (caves)</li> <li>• 2001 Ramsar site (Baradla cave and water catchment area)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1973 Protected Landscape Area</li> <li>• 1977 Biosphere Reserve</li> <li>• 2002 National Park</li> <li>• 1995 World Heritage (caves)</li> <li>• 2001 Ramsar site (Domica cave and water catchment area)</li> </ul>	√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√</li> <li>√</li> <li>√</li> </ul>

In the socialist era, cooperation was formalised but basically meant irregular meetings of the Aggtelek NP and Slovak Karst PLA, the Czechoslovakian later the Slovakian Cave Directorate directors (until the establishment of the Slovak Karst National Park, the non show caves were managed by the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape administration).

Direct contact between the then two PLAs started in 1980. At that time it mainly meant the meeting of directors, and occasionally staff meetings. The cooperation was made official by the two ministers of environment through a cooperation agreement in 1991. On 4<sup>th</sup> October 1991 the agreement was signed by the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Rural Development and the Slovakian Environmental Protection Authority. It included a protocol listing 10 basic points in order to enhance environmental protection in trans-boundary cooperation. Point 6/e states that a joint nature conservation programme between ANP and SKPLA has to be elaborated for their common ecological values. Based on point 8, a joint committee was established that was to meet regularly to discuss common problems and the results achieved and to assign common goals.

A similar document was also signed by the ANP and the SKPLA on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1991. It stated joint objectives of effective and practical cooperation in the conserva-

tion of both surface and underground assets in the Gömör-Torna Karst. These were the following:

- establishing and operating a base for raising Saker (*Falco cherrug*) siblings and their reintroduction
- exchange of available literature for information transfer
- exchange of scientific research results especially on Turňa Golden Drop (*Onosma tornense*) and Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)
- joint protection of caves and water courses
- initiating that the Aggtelek-Domica and the Tornanádaska-Host'ovce border stations should become international ones for the enhancement of tourism in the region
- organising bi-annual meeting of the directors in order to evaluate achievements, and to formulate new common goals

After the split of Czechoslovakia, the cooperation agreement was renewed between the Republic of Hungary and the Republic of Slovakia. A document was prepared by the ANP for the Ministry of Environment and Rural Development with a suggestion to establish a trans-national park for the more effective protection of the Gömör-Torna Karst. This document also suggested the nomination of a common World Heritage site. The first idea has not, but the latter one has been fulfilled (1995).

A Partnership Work Program (as a EUROPARC programme) was elaborated and signed 13<sup>th</sup> July 1998. The three-year programme included basic topics (*see next chapter*: staff exchange, research, surveys, species conservation and monitoring projects, harmonisation of policies) that are still relevant and actual tasks, and included in the annually renewed cooperation agreement.

### 3.3.3. Topics of TBC

#### **Surface and biotic nature conservation**

Common annual work plans of the Aggtelek National Park Directorate and the Slovak Karst National Park Directorate have been elaborated since 1998. Since then the following topics and tasks have been included:

#### **I. Topic: Management Plan and Zonation**

*Activity:* Revision and reconciliation of the management plans/management conceptions and zonation in order to elaborate the strategy of common management actions and the appropriate zonation.

*Results:* After initialising the coordination work and standardising the criteria it has not come alive for economical and political reasons.

#### **II. Topic: Nature conservation and forest management**

*Activity:* The aim of this program was to survey the state of the forests which are highly impacted by economic forestry - plantation with non-native species, spontaneously invaded forests by non-native species - and to elaborate the rehabilitation plan for these forests with cost estimation.

*Results:* The intention to create a standardised forest register which would be essential for better forest management has not been successful.

#### **III. Topic: Common Biosphere Reserve and Ramsar Site**

*Activity:* Preparation of common nomination to unify the two Biosphere Reserves and to establish a Ramsar Site.

**Results:** The common BR idea has not gone beyond expressing intentions and no action has been taken. It has been a topic in the MAB Committee and the meeting of the intergovernmental nature conservation working group of Hungary and Slovakia in July 2007.

The nomination of the Ramsar site was handed to the national Ramsar committees. Both areas have been declared Ramsar Sites, though separately. Together the assigned water catchment area covers 1693.8 ha (Domica: 621.8 ha, Baradla: 1072 ha). For the long term protection of this internationally important wetland habitat a coordinated research programme and monitoring system is under preparation (survey and evaluation of potential threats, survey and monitoring of hydrology, research on soil erosion, etc.)

#### **IV. Topic: Turňa Golden Drop (*Onosma tornense* Jáv.)**

**Activity:** Turňa golden drop (*Onosma tornense* Jáv.) endangered endemic plant which is listed in the World Red Data Book of endangered species, and it is worth paying special attention to it is an "endangered, exclusive Carpathian natural value" according to the Bern Convention.

The program contains the survey of the population, mapping of the abundance and several coenological and ecological investigations to examine the effects of human impacts on this species.

**Results:** The point mapping of the species was completed in 1999 on the Hungarian side, partial results on the Slovakian side. Coenological and ecological investigations and monitoring have started. Common research periods were assigned and completed in 2000, though different research methods were used, later harmonisation was agreed upon. The Tree-of-heaven (*Ailantus altissima*) control has started on Turňa Golden Drop habitats.

#### **V. Topic: Alien Invasive Species**

**Activity:** Alien invasive species represent a serious problem internationally, affecting not only biological diversity but for example human health as well.

The aims of the programme are to map the distribution of *Solidago canadensis* and *S. gigantea*, to monitor their extension, to study the characteristic features of these species and to follow the effectiveness of the different management methods.

**Results:** Regular camps and eradication actions for preventing the extension of its habitat are organised.

#### **VI. Topic: Birds in Anthropogenic Habitats – White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), Barn owl (*Tyto alba*)**

**Activity:** The two strictly protected species (*Ciconia ciconia*, *Tyto alba*), also included in the Bern Convention, use anthropogenic habitats as nesting places. The programme includes the survey of nesting places, population-dynamical investigations and the maintenance of nests (artificial nesting boxes, cleaning the garrets, etc.). Very important part of the programme is the communication with local inhabitants, the owners of the buildings and the keepers of the churches in order to increase the awareness of the fact how endangered these species are.

**Results:** Very good results on both sides (e.g. a few artificial nesting boxes were taken by Barn owls). With the help of a Liechtenstein foundation supporting the white stork conservation, regular programmes and competitions are held for local pupils, an activity book for children was published and a series of posters are on a travelling exhibition.

#### **VII. Topic: Corncrake (*Crex crex*)**

**Activity:** The corncrake is a strictly protected bird species listed in the European Red Data Book of endangered animals. The programme includes the survey of corncrake

populations, the mapping of nesting pairs and the coordination of land-use in the territory of the corncrake.

*Results:* Survey projects take place regularly, results are shared.

#### **VIII. Topic:** Cave-dwelling Bats and Bat Colonies in Buildings

*Activity:* European bats are insectivorous animals, and therefore suffer seriously from uncontrolled use of insecticides. There is also considerable popular dislike of bats, and many people feel hate rather than sympathy towards them. However, by far the most dangerous problem is the dramatic disappearance of roosting and feeding sites.

The programme includes the survey of cave-dwelling bat colonies in the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area and the Aggtelek National Park and the development of monitoring the effects of tourism on bat populations.

A high number of bat species has their main breeding colonies in the garrets and towers of churches and castles. In this case, besides the survey of the colonies, the education and enlightenment of local people and also practical measures (cleaning the garrets, etc.) are important.

*Results:* Survey projects take place regularly, results are shared.

#### **IX. Topic:** NATURA 2000 and harmonisation of the National Ecological Network Systems

*Activity:* As accessing countries to the EU both countries joined this European programme. Both on local and national level it was a priority to do coordinated work.

*Results:* Regular meetings, exchange of data and maps for the assignment of trans-border situated NATURA 2000 areas, elaboration of common management plans (in progress), sharing experiences on the two nature conservation information system development, special attention to species occurring in both countries.

#### **X. Topic:** Large carnivores in cross-border habitats

*Activity:* A special attention is paid to large carnivores not only on an international level, but also they are considered flagship species in all protected areas. Hungary launched a LIFE project on monitoring wolf, lynx and wild cat populations in 2001. It included the North Hungarian Mountains, so a monitoring station was set up in the Aggtelek Karst. Since the ecological corridor in the Gömör-Torna Karst and its further connection to the more northerly Slovakian mountains is partly located in Slovakia, the involvement of Slovakian experts was inevitable.

*Results:* The study had results on all three large carnivore species but most data and was collected and a special attention was paid to wolves. Information and data exchange was ensured on population size and composition, results of the analysis of hair and excrement samples (genetic mapping, parasite examination), prey as source of information. Common synchronised field monitoring occasions have been organised. Though the LIFE project ended in 2006, the research and monitoring and cross-border cooperation still continues. Nature conservation specialists participating in the large carnivore project were involved in the reporting on the Kosice - Rožňava motorway development project, which is important to minimise impact on the present populations and on the migration routes.

As a result of the LIFE project and of the cross-border cooperation, legislation on the hunting of wolf has been changed. Earlier it was allowed between 1 November and 15 January, now it is prohibited in protected areas all year round.

#### **XI. Topic:** INTERREG IIIA HUSKUA: Development of biomonitoring network necessary for effective management of protected areas

*Activity:* The project was elaborated with the East Slovakian Museum on the Slovakian Side and the Aggtelek NPD on the Hungarian side as a common project (the Slovak

Karst NPD was not competent to enter the project as main applicant, but gives all technical assistance in the project). It can be considered as an umbrella project, covering some of the topics listed above but as a 2-years (April 2006 – March 2008) intense project it has to be mentioned separately.

*Objectives:* The main objective of the project is forming and intensifying a long-term professional cross-border co-operation. In the frame of this co-operation an environmental monitoring system will be improved and developed. The main aims of the project are botanical and zoological general state assessment and monitoring which will be carried out with the same methods in both sides of the border. These data will help us to develop a monitoring system working with the same principles and methods. In a long run the joint monitoring help in the joint elaboration and execution of nature conservation tasks to protect our natural assets. The co-operation also include thorough assessment and monitoring of alien invasive plant species, which endanger the natural habitats in the national parks and their surroundings and cause human health problems (allergy). The defence against these plants can be effective with cooperative work in both sides of the border. This project also include jointly organised programmes (e.g. open days on nature conservation), and publishing bilingual prospectus to show the rules concern to protected areas and the development of the monitoring system.

*Result:* It is still an on-going programme.

### **Underground and abiotic nature conservation**

Cave research and protection has always been centrally coordinated and managed in Slovakia, whereas coordination is also on ministerial level in Hungary but management is carried out locally. In this sense the Aggtelek National Park Directorate has a direct relationship with the Slovakian Speleology Institute, Liptovský Mikuláš and the Speleology Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Environment, but little official connection with the very caves on the Slovak Karst.

#### **I. Topic:** Radon activity concentration research

*Activity:* Between 1986 and 1988 coordinated series of research took place in caves on the two sides of the border.

*Results:* Data shared.

#### **II. Topic:** Contamination in caves, primarily in the Baradla-Domica cave system

*Activity:* Agricultural contamination (excrement of grazing animals, pesticide and fertiliser usage in arable lands) have resulted high level of some substances (e.g. ammonium, nitrate) and foaming in some of the caves. Control and restriction of these activities were necessary to reduce contamination. Since the 1990s agriculture has dramatically decreased, so a spontaneous drop of contamination has occurred. Nevertheless, a water quality monitoring system was installed in the Baradla-Domica cave system in both sides of the border monitoring the water quality in the Styx and Acheron underground streams.

*Results:* Contamination has been considerably reduced. Since the monitoring system was installed in 2002 results have been shared, but major action has not been necessary. The results have been analysed in a common presentation.

#### **III. Topic:** Common Ramsar Site – see above Topic III.

#### **IV. Topic:** Exploring the hydrological connection between the Milada cave, Slovakia and the Vass Imre cave, Hungary

*Activity:* The long-debated connection between the two caves was investigated with the H40 bacteriophage detection method in 2006. Following four years of preparation

and waiting for the suitable hydrological conditions, a joint research team set up sampling points and measurement stations.

*Results:* Connection does not exist between the two systems.

**V. Topic:** Assignment of the protection and surface areas of caves

*Activity:* Hungarian experts (involving the ANP and Ministry of Environment staff) have elaborated the set of criteria that was discussed and accepted with the Slovakian partners.

*Results:* The protection and surface area of the Baradla-Domica Cave on both sides and the same of the Vass Imre cave on the Hungarian side have been assigned.

**VI. Topic:** Publications

*Activity:* Different types of publications have been prepared that are mainly connected in one way or the other to the common World Heritage. Printed materials are usually published in three languages: Hungarian, Slovakian and English.

*Results:* Any publication by any organisation or institution that has been produced underlines the organic relationship of the two sides of the border. Examples:

- The caves of the Aggtelek and Slovak Karst – leaflet on the World Heritage
- 12 pieces postcard series on the most prominent caves of the Aggtelek and Slovak Karst
- Baradla-Domica cave system – leaflet on the Ramsar Site
- Protection of caves – video
- Slovakian-Hungarian technical dictionary of nature conservation – manuscript (includes headings not only of speleology, but also of general nature conservation)

**VII. Topic:** Exhibitions

*Activity and results:* To present the scientific findings and the speleologic assets two common exhibitions have been initiated. The one on the cave archaeological findings was opened in the Domica cave visitor building on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Heritage site. The mobile panel exhibition on the World Heritage was initiated in 2005 but is still under preparation.

**VIII. Topic:** Miscellaneous/ad hoc activities

*Activity:* Mutual exchange of technical data and publications. Disaster reduction actions

*Results:*

- Good information flow.
- One of the most relevant information exchanges is the one on the methodology and technical solutions in cave developments. In that field there cooperation takes place not only with the Slovakian Cave Management Directorate but also with other Central European cave authorities and cave management institutions.
- The rescue quest of a cave diver in the Rákóczi cave was such a complex and strenuous task that without the volunteer work of the Slovak cavers and specialists (most of them from the Slovak Karst region) it would have not been possible and successful.
- When the information panels and locality signs of the World Heritage was designed on the Hungarian side (a joint and national programme of the Ministry

of Environment, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Economy 2003-2004), the Slovakian design was taken into consideration and with the permission of the Slovak Karst NP (they were responsible for their panels and signs before 2002, and consequently produced them) it was used.

### **Tourism and eco-education**

Again the Aggtelek NPD activities include tourism, whereas the Slovak Karst NPD has no such activity. In consequence, the Aggtelek NPD has built partnership with a range of organisations.

#### **I. Topic: Cave tourism**

*Activity:* The level of cooperation has been changing, interestingly not for the better. In the 1980's the Baradla Aggtelek and the Domica part could be visited with the same guide from either side of the border, and even before the simultaneous EU accession, one could cross the border with an ID card (!) for that purpose. The breaking off of Czechoslovakia has put an end to this system.

*Result:* Beyond minimal promotional activities, basically there is no cooperation between the Slovak cave management organisation and the ANPD.

#### **II. Topic: Border crossing stations and points**

*Activity:* Two border crossing stations can be found in the Gömör-Torna Karst region. The Aggtelek – Domica is an international whereas the Tornanádaska – Hostovce before the simultaneous EU accession (2004) used to be a facility for only Slovakian and Hungarian citizens, and after the accession it was open for citizens of the EU and the European Economy Region. After Slovakia became independent in 1992 and before 2004 there were years of joint efforts by the two ministries of environment, the two local protected areas, related municipalities and NGO's to make both border stations fully international and at least one of them non-stop operating (they were open 8 hours in the winter, and 12 hours in the summer season). This topic has always been on the list of topics and tasks in cross-border negotiations. Also the eco-tourism border crossing points for hikers and bikers were assigned as a result of common negotiations, fully considering nature conservation limits and zonation.

*Result:* Of the two border stations only the Aggtelek one received international status and none did non-stop operation. Occasionally and on the condition of payment, temporary lengthened operation could be achieved – especially during the Gömör-Torna Festival. The Vidomájpuszta - Hrušov and the Trizs – Starňa green border crossing points were opened in 2006 and allow border crossing from 7 a.m. till 7. p.m. all year round. (Interesting fact is, that the roads on which they were set up used to be major roads in historic Hungary, before the Trianon peace treaty in 1921, and are still in relatively good shape due to their former border guarding relevance.)

As the two countries will become part of the Schengen area from 2008, the state border will become a virtual and political line. It will considerably ease communication, local citizen and tourist flow in the Karst region.

#### **III. Topic: Organising events**

*Activity:* It is more and more common that municipalities invite their cross border partners and representatives of the two protected areas on the occasion of events. It does not really mean common organisation and cooperation, but such events are important to maintain networking.

Occasional and single sport, cultural or even nature conservationist type events are also organised with cross-border participants and sites (e.g. Ancient Music Festival, International Shawm<sup>2</sup> Festival).

A real and regular cross-border cultural and ecotourism event was initiated in 2000, when the preparation of the Gömör-Torna Festival started. The first such 10-days event was held in 2001. The name selection consciously suggested the cross-border feature, which has improved considerably during the 7 years of organisation: first mainly the cross-border (Slovakian) performers were invited, and as event site the cross-border bicycle tour outlined this feature, while since 2006 five Slovakian locations have joined in. Coordination is a task of the Aggtelek NPD on the Hungarian side, and the Gemer Youth Association on the Slovakian side. The representatives of the two organisations carry out the general and common coordination work as well. In 2007 fourteen partners signed a cooperation agreement (Hungarian, Slovakian, English versions), and accepted a common set of criteria controlling the whole festival as such.

*Results:* The level of cooperation varies in organising events. The far most developed really common event is the Gömör-Torna Festival. It actually cannot just be evaluated as a mere and simple cultural event, partly because it has major elements connected to natural assets and nature conservation, partly because the partners working on it have common actions in other fields of activities, and partly, because of its complexity it can be further developed into a real tourism product. It has a big potential to become an umbrella event in the whole Karst region (its time scale could be also extended in the future).

#### **IV. Topic:** Promotion and marketing

##### *Activities and results:*

- Slovak Karst Caves and Slovak Cave Management Directorate: As a result of different institutional structure and eligibility the common World Heritage title is not used for common "business" purposes. At the moment very limited mutual promotion activities are ongoing (e.g. billboard of the Domica cave at the entrance area of the Baradla, promotion leaflets in the Slovak Karst show the caves of the Aggtelek National Park). The publication of common materials, participation in tourism fairs (without the intergovernmental working group decision) has not been realised, mainly for the strange attitude of the Slovakian partner (e.g. charging fee for photographs to be published).
- Gömör/Gemer Card: Since the area is quite rich in both cultural and natural assets, and because major tourist attractions are in the Karst region, some of the management organisations established this tourism card, providing 20% discount from the entrance fees. At present the following sites are "members": Baradla cave, Jósvaló Village Museum, Rudabánya Museum of Mining and Mineralogy, Aggtelek Gingerbread Workshop, Betliar, Krasnahorska Castle Museum, Rožňava Watch Tower, Rožňava Museum of Mining. There are negotiations with restaurants to join the system in order to broaden the selection of services. Maybe accommodations could become members in the future. Such extension makes it necessary to elaborate a set of criteria. The stamping system card has its own logo, and some on-site promotion.
- Cooperation between the Tourinform-Aggtelek tourist information office (operated by the Aggtelek NPD) and the Tourist Information Centre Rožňava (TIC) (operated by the Municipality of Rožňava). The Event and Service Guide of the Aggtelek Karst and its Region (published in Hungary) includes a section on the Slovak Karst. Information and data in this section and the Slovak translation is done by the TIC. It is published in Hungarian, Slovakian, Polish, English, German and French in 80.000 copies. A relatively large number is also

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<sup>2</sup> Historic musical instrument



distributed by the TIC. An accommodation catalogue of the Slovak Karst region, published by the TIC has extended its scope to the Hungarian side of the border in 2007. To develop the common marketing activities, the system of a cross border thematic series of marketing publications is under preparation.

#### **V. Topic:** Eco-education and awareness raising

##### *Activities and results:*

- The most successful common eco-education programme in the two NPs is on the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*). Both NPs are in contact with local schools, e.g. regular surveys and sightings are undertaken and drawing competitions are organised. There are regular pupil exchange visits in the programme. An activity book for children was published and a series of posters are on a travelling exhibition.
- Green Island is the name of an initiative to bring the nature conservation activities closer to the grass-roots of all age. It was organised the last two years during the Gömör-Torna Festival. The complex programme includes the following elements: panel exhibition on nature conservation and cooperation activities of the Aggtelek and Slovak Karst NPs; info sessions with NP experts; nature conservation games and playful activities for children.
- Exhibitions of children's works of art (competitions are announced separately) exchanged.
- Staff exchange and consultation meetings of specialists.

In terms of trans-boundary cooperation the ever improving relationship with the European Underground World Heritage Sites (beyond the Slovak Karst caves) has to be mentioned. It includes the Skockan cave (Slovenia), the Wieliczka Salt Mine (Poland), the Dachstein caves (Austria) and Berchtesgaden (Germany). All European Underground World Heritage Sites participated in the publication of a common poster in 2001. With the Wieliczka Salt Mine there is an even closer cooperation established by a cooperation agreement signed in 2005. It basically targets mutual promotion and marketing (exchange of promotion leaflets and billboards at visitors' areas, homepage links, the publication of a common leaflet in Hungarian, Polish, English and German in 2007) and staff exchange. It is partly the result of this cooperation that all these sites are also members of the International Show Caves Association.

### **3.4 TBC in the frame of the project**

The work plan of the project elaborated for the Hungarian part of the Karst region was counterchecked with main Slovakian partner GIT (Gemer Youth Association), and based on the jointly defined meeting points a much more detailed work plan was developed regarding the trans-boundary issues of the project. Many of the project activities were implemented in cooperation with partners from the Slovakian side, especially the Slovak Karst National Park and the GIT.

The main cross-border activity of the project was the organisation of the Gömör-Torna Festival. During the project, this festival evolved into a true trans-boundary event that involves numerous partner organisations and villages on the Hungarian and the Slovak side.

To achieve this,

- the Gömör Youth Association was involved to coordinate and communicate the aims and tasks to the already involved and the potential Slovakian partners;

- five new programme sites were involved from the Slovakian side, which resulted in a more balanced areal distribution;
- the PR and marketing activity and materials became bilingual in 2007;
- efforts were enhanced to keep the border stations open non-stop at Aggtelek/Domica and Tornaádaska/Turna nad Bodvou which failed until the two countries entered the Schengen agreement for political/diplomatic reasons, but on a limited scale, the border crossings had extended opening hours during the festival;
- efforts were made to launch a cross border festival shuttle bus system which failed in 2006, but was realised in 2007. Unfortunately it was not a success. The area proved to be too larger to be covered, and also there was not enough capacity to publicize the service properly.
- the two NPs/BRs presented their work together within the frame of the Green Island initiative, which consists of a poster exhibition, temporary experience trail for children and various on-site activities;
- establishing the Gömör-Torna Market Place as a 4 days event within the GTF, dedicated exclusively to the handicraftsmen and farmers of the transfrontier region;
- in 2007, all project partners, also those from the Šumava and Babia Góra BRs, participated in the GTF, and a one day forum on trans-boundary cooperation in tourism was organised with local stakeholders.

Further activities of the project involved partners and stakeholders from Slovakia and shared outputs with the Slovakian side:

The research of land use history and landscape changes was based on previous studies done in the Aggtelek area. In Aggtelek and the neighbouring Slovak Karst region with their special landscape and natural values there is great need for historical background information. These serve as essential elements for the professional basis of biomonitoring programs, nature conservational research, restoration and rehabilitation activities, environmentally friendly farming methods and conservation management plans.

In 2000, the land use map of Aggtelek National Park had been created among the first ones showing 3 time levels. During the use and application of the map some small shortcomings had come to light, which have been solved since then due to the development of interpretation techniques. When applying the historical land use maps in nature conservation, the need for processing new time levels has risen, especially for maps from the 1950's. After the Aggtelek Karst region was nominated World Heritage site, the cooperation between the experts working on both sides of the border became still closer. During consultations with Slovakian conservationists the need arose to create the historical land use maps of the Slovakian Karst Biosphere Reserve as well which could be realised in the frame of this project. The research has been realised by experts from the two national parks together with experts from the EISD.

During the development of the tourism management plan for the Aggtelek BR, representatives from the Slovakian partner organisations (Gemer Youth Organisation, Slovak Karst Tourism Club) were fully involved in the planning process. As the strategy and management plan focuses on the project area, the cross-border area is included in the document only marginally, just to provide an insight into the broader context. However, experts and stakeholders were involved in the whole process to safeguard further extension and development of the plan in case of sufficient funding.

The capacity building and awareness raising measures targeting stakeholders dealing with tourism or any kind of related activities in the Gömör-Torna Karst region provided trainings and workshop about sustainable development, strengthening the income generating potentials especially in the light of other outcomes of the project, founding

the base of future successful partnership programmes and providing trainings adapted to the local conditions. In some of the various trainings offered, people from the Slovakian side of the region participated.

The guidelines on sound tourism for local stakeholders have been developed for and based on the Hungarian project area; nevertheless, the results can be shared effectively with the trans-boundary partners, considering the fact that the baseline situation is more or less the same in the two sides of the border (natural and cultural assets and heritage, socio-economic situation, funds available, etc.). The document is available for the cross-border stakeholders in Hungarian and Slovak language.

### **3.5 Obstacles for TBC**

#### **3.5.1. Language barrier**

Because of the historic background, Hungarian was the language of cooperation in the project, but in order to avoid excluding the Slovakian people from the information, the relevant posters were published also in Slovak, and all the project reports contained Slovakian summary.

#### **3.5.2. Economic conditions**

- Differences: Originally the bio-geographic unit of the Karst formed also a well-functioning socio-economic system, but the Trianon Treaty has drawn an artificial state border across the region. The settlements on the Hungarian side found themselves on the periphery, being cut off from the traditional big markets and historical centres of the region (the land suitable for economic activities, business, trade activities and transportation was also given to Slovakia). After the II. World War the industrialization of the Sajó valley attracted the labour from the villages, the majority moved to the quickly evolving industrial towns, and just a few people stayed in their home villages. Nowadays the population suffers from this gap in the age and manpower structure.
- The conditions are better on the Slovakian side: the Bratislava – Košice axis provides good connection and development opportunities in the region. The industrial output in the district is even today represented by primary and processing industry. To a lesser extent, there are the machine, textile, and food processing industries. Despite efforts to develop processing and oil drilling industries, the Slovensky Kras region is economically very depressed. The most viable are companies that have foreign investors.
- Given the natural values in the region, on both sides tourism might have the highest potential for long-term income generation for the local population. However, because of the lack of capital and of the vulnerable features of natural assets, only small-scale, soft tourism developments might be feasible here.

#### **3.5.3. Private sector**

- Hungary: The number of “real” active businesses is rather low, except for the large-scale chemical companies in the Sajó valley. In the early 1990's there was a boom in the establishment of enterprises in Hungary, and this is true for whole BAZ county as well. The number of enterprises was doubled between 1990 and 1995, and reached the number of 45.000 in our county. The reasons behind this phenomenon were (1) the introduction of private enterprises into the Hungarian economy (as “ex-socialist” country), and the quickly increasing ratio of unemployment, especially in the regions with heavy industry – like the Sajó valley and the surrounding areas, including the Gömör-Torna part as well.

- The previous 2/3-1/3 ratio between people employed in large businesses and small & medium enterprises turned over. The major part of the enterprises - 64% - is run by one person ("sole proprietor"). It means that more than 60% of the businesses in BAZ County do not have a single employee. The number of entrepreneurs employing 0-9 people is also high. In contrary, the share of medium-sized businesses is around 1%, and ratio of large scale companies (employing more than 250 people) is 0.1%.
- General problems on the Hungarian side:
  - lack of skills and knowledge (population contra-selected during the past few decades);
  - lack of capital to invest;
  - even the own contribution to applications causes problems
  - lack in educated manpower

#### 3.5.4. NGOs

- Hungary: Although there is a number of a registered organisations in the region, most of them were established for sport reasons, and do not carry out activities for the maintenance of the cultural traditions and natural values. (Relevant local NGOs present: Galyaság Village Association. Gömör-Torna Foundation, the newly established Public Benefit association for Tornakápolna Village, Gömör Association for the Development of Environment and Landscape).
- There is only one association focusing primarily on village tourism (Galyaság Association of Rural Accommodation Providers) but this is almost not functioning.

#### 3.5.5. Difficulties in opening the borders

- 3 border crossings could be found in the project area, Bánréve/Král', Aggtelek/Domica and Tornanádaska/Turňa n. Bodvou. Bánréve/Král' is open 0-24, but it falls far from the main traffic routes. Aggtelek/Domica is right in the middle of the area, providing comfortable shortcut in the direction of Rožňava and the major part of the settlements involved into the project activities. However, this was open only between 8-16 in winter, 8-17 in summertime (with the exception of weekends, when it was open from Friday till Sunday evening nonstop). The crossing at Tornanádaska was open from 8-20 all days. Limited open hours hindered many of the cultural programmes – on both sides of the state border, and a part of the budget must had been paid to the border guard service for the extra hours requested.
- However, Hungary and Slovakia became members of the Schengen Treaty, which eliminated this problem from January 2008.
- Another very good option till then was the "Northern Green Trails" system, providing crossings on tourist trails or traditional old routes. These crossings could be passed only on foot, bicycle or simple water vehicles between 7-19 h for tourism purposes (120/2006. (V.17.) gov. decree).

## 4. Trans-boundary Cooperation in Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve

### 4.1 Introduction

The region of Babia Góra (Poland) and Babia Hora (Slovakia) is characterized by a complex of ecosystems and habitats of the highest massif of Flysch part of the Outer Western Carpathians (Western Beskydy Mts.) with natural (virgin forest) communities of the spruce vegetation belt, sub-alpine and alpine zone of the peak part of the Babia Góra massif, dispersed mires and wet sub-montane meadows.

The Babia Góra Biosphere Reserves has been established in 1977. It encompasses the Babia Góra National Park (BGNP), which administration is the only institution that takes over certain responsibility for the biosphere reserve as well. In 2001, the Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve was extended. The transition area was based on the existing protection zone of the BGNP which covers about 8437 ha.

The majority of Slovakian part of the area is a part of Horná Orava Protected Landscape Area (hereafter "Horná Orava PLA") with the second and the third level of nature protection according to the Slovak Act No. 543/2002 on Nature and Landscape Protection (here and after "the Nature and Landscape Protection Act"). The "A" zone of Babia Hora is interconnected with the core zone of the Biosphere Reserve Babia Góra and should ensure complex conservation of the most threatened and rare habitats in this ridge area.

During the implementation of the project, ideas to establish a biosphere reserve at the Slovakian side and to join the two BRs, leading to the establishment of a trans-boundary BR were developing further.

All representative ecosystems typical for the Beskydy Mts. region can be found in the proposed trans-boundary BR. In the core area occur natural montane forests of the spruce vegetation belt, near natural alpine and sub-alpine communities of Flysch zone, which were partly influenced by human activities in the past (grazing). In the buffer zone there are natural forested and non-forested peatland, raised bogs and mires of transitional type, as well as forest communities of montane spruce groves managed by man on the ecological principles. In the transitional zone there is the landscape mosaic formed by semi-natural meadows, pastures, forests and small blocks of arable land used by local people.

The biggest potential of the area represent forests and rural tourism. The beauties and amenities of protected areas attract visitors to the buffer zone and transitional zone. Development of forestry is concentrated on renewable resources. Forest fulfils not only economical and protection functions, but it is also an important habitat for many plant and animal species and it is a suitable space for recreation and tourism. The role of the transitional zone is preservation of settlements and landscape character suitable for rural tourism development. Optimal linking of natural and cultural attractions in transitional zone, preservation of rural settlements and landscape character, traditional agriculture, tourism and recreation development should contribute to sustainable de-

velopment of the region, which is mutually beneficial for environment and for people. Tourism development is connected to the improvement of economic situation of local inhabitants and the increase of employment in the region (services, trade, traditional crafts etc.). Among the current problems of tourism development are the concentration of visitor streams to the core zone of the PLA/BGNP which encompasses the highest peak of the Babia Góra massif, and the pressure imposed by the expectations of local communities and investors to allow big-scale infrastructure development, e.g. ski resorts, both imposing threats on the natural environment. Tourism development itself is adversely affected by the loss of labour due to emigration, the decline of local culture and traditions in the course of economic transition and emigration and the lack of capacities for quality management of tourism.

## 4.2 Framework of TBC

### 4.2.1. Programme of the Slovak-Polish cooperation

The cooperation of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Horná Orava PLA Administration with the BGNP administration is based on the Agreement of Cooperation that was signed on 7 June 2002.

The cooperation proceeds at several levels:

- cooperation in preparation of the proposal for Babia Góra/Babia Hora Biosphere Reserve,
- monitoring of number of visitors of the top parts of Babia Góra,
- research of fauna of Babia Góra - capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*),
- research of flora of Babia Góra - *Salix herbacea*, *Diphasiastrum alpinum*, *Alilium schoenoprasum* ssp. *alpinum*,
- inventory of occurrence and monitoring of *Cerastium alpinum* ssp. *babiogorense*
- working sessions
- joint production of a book "Światy Babiej Góry" (The World of Babia Góra) (texts, photos), and of a Slovak-Polish booklet "Babia Góra with no borders"
- organising of a seminar "Protection of diversity of mountain forests of northern Orava – Babia Góra"

#### Planned activities:

- Cooperation in attitudes to handling with a problem of cycling routes and mountain biking in the area of Babia Góra
- Inventory of pseudo-Karst caves in Babia Góra
- Organising of common Green Days – For clean a Babia Góra (primary pupils, general public)
- Production of common promotional materials
- Monitoring of the state of forests of Babia Góra
- Setting up of a common web site
- Setting up and publishing of a common Polish-Slovak periodical Babia Góra/Babia Hora

The intended management plan for the Babia Hora/Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve will be a strategic document for the protection of nature and landscape and sustainable use of the area's resources. This management plan should include prospective and operational goals and practical measures, including deadlines and responsible persons and institutions, which will be harmonised for the planned BR Babia Hora and in the existing BR Babia Góra. Approved goals and measures in the management plan for the area of international importance will take precedence over approved goals and measures in the management plan for Horná Orava PLA in the respective area or the management plan of the BGNP. The management plan for the Babia Hora/Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve is foreseen to be finalized by the end of 2008.

#### **4.2.2. Intergovernmental agreements to enhance trans-boundary cooperation**

##### **Village associations**

The proposal for the nomination of the Slovakian biosphere reserve has been supported also by the Association of Villages Babia Hora and is based in long-term cooperation with Polish near-border municipalities.

The establishment of this association of seven municipalities (Bobrov, Klin, Oravská Polhora, Rabča, Rabčice, Sihelné and Zubrohlava) was based on a long-term cooperation with the Polish border municipalities in the field of land use, scientific and cultural activities. There are important efforts made in the Orava communities regarding the protection and sustainable use of the natural values of the Horná Orava region through tourism development, guided hiking and cycling tours and agro-tourism. Since 2000, cooperation with the neighbour association at the Polish side – Stowarzyszenie Gmin Babiogórskich (SGB) has been developed. The SGB was established in 1995, and is seated in Zawoja. The subject of its activities is a joint cross-border cooperation supporting cultural activities in surroundings of Babia Góra. Members of the Association are 40 villages of 10 "gminas" (municipalities): Koszarawa, Stryżawa, Zembrzyc, Budzowa, Makow Podhalański, Zawoja, Bystrej-Sidziny, Jablonka, Lipnica Wielka, Lanckoron and Jordanów. This area of 1048 km<sup>2</sup> is inhabited by around 100.000 people. The main goal is to improve cooperation between its members and conservation of natural and cultural heritage of this area through the support of the economic development.

The Association of Villages Babia Hora recently was working on the publication "On the trails and pathways of Horná Orava region", which is planned to be published in three languages. Since this is a "mirror" project with Polish partners, the publication will be produced in Polish and Slovak language and in a shortened English version. Its contents will include a description of the features of the attractive hiking trails and other tourism attractions on the territory of the Slovak Biela Orava and Polish Čierna Orava basins. An important part of the activities for dissemination of information to self-governments about the preparations for the Babia Hora Biosphere Reserve was a presentation and discussion within the meeting of representatives of the Association of Villages Babia Hora in Bobrov in 2002. The conference devoted to the activities of the association was held on 20 October 2004 in Bobrov and members of both the Association of Villages Babia Hora and the Polish association Stowarzyszenie Gmin Babiogórskich (SGB) participated. Representatives of the State Nature Conservancy of SR, Administration of Horná Orava PLA were also invited and a presentation on the proposed BR Babia Hora to the general public was offered (to municipalities, teachers of kindergartens and primary schools).

Local communities participate actively in the preparation of management plans through self-governments and associations. Local inhabitants are regularly informed about the preparation of the nomination for the BR through information in regional press, presentations in primary and secondary schools and organisations, especially the State Nature Conservancy of SR, Administration of Horná Orava PLA.

### EuroRegion Beskydy

The EuroRegion Beskydy was established first between the Polish and Slovak parts and expanded with the Czech part in 2000. Main goal of the EuroRegion is to develop joint activities which contribute to the sustainable development of the region and to foster the communication, exchange and cooperation of its population and institutions. Activities target at the improvement of the labour market situation, infrastructure and transport as well as nature conservation

Examples for agreements or arrangements between municipalities, schools etc. are:

- Cooperation of municipalities within the Association of villages Babia Hora (Bobrov, Oravská Polhora, Rabča, Rabčice, Sihelné and Zubrohlava) with the association Stowarzyszenie gmin Babiogórskich – Sucha Beskydska in Poland – cooperation in the fields of culture, sports and environment
- Organising of an annual epistemic contest “Learn about your region” for primary pupils from villages in trans-border area, and a “LEONARDO” event – exchange of winners for recreational stays
- Cultural events organised by Oravská Polhora – Gajdovačky (backpiper’s event)
- Cooperation of the primary school in Bobrov (Slovakia) with the school in Lipnica Wielka (Poland) and the school in Rabča (Slovakia) with the Polish village Swinna
- Cooperation of voluntary fire fighters in Bobrov and in Lipnica Wielka

Ongoing activities:

- Cooperation in conservation and sustainable use of natural values of montane forests, sub-alpine and alpine communities of Babia Hora,
- Cooperation in tourism management in the region of Babia Hora.
- Planned activities:
- Cooperation in management of cycling trails and mountain biking in the area of Babia Hora.

## 4.3 Forms and quality of TBC

### 4.3.1. Legal organisations of TBC

The most important organisations for the TBC are the Slovak Horná Orava PLA Administration in Námestovo and the Polish Babia Góra National Park Administration in Zawoja.

### 4.3.2. Regional organisations

The Slovak association of seven municipalities (Bobrov, Klin, Oravská Polhora, Rabča, Rabčice, Sihelné and Zubrohlava) cooperates since 2000 with the neighbour association on the Polish side, the Stowarzyszenie Gmin Babiogórskich (SGB). The SGB was established in 1995, and is seated in Zawoja. The subject of activities is joint cross-border cooperation supporting cultural activities in surroundings of Babia Góra. Members are 40 villages of 10 “gminas” (municipalities): Koszarawa, Stryzawa, Zembrzyc, Budzowa, Makow Podhalański, Zawoja, Bystrej-Sidziny, Jablonka, Lipnica Wielka, Lnckoron and Jordanów.

**Universities, scientific institutions:** The Slovak part cooperates with several universities and scientific institutions: Technical University in Zvolen, Comenius University in



Bratislava, Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. The Polish BR cooperates with the Jagiellonian University of Krakow, and the High School of Tourism in Sucha Beskidzka. These are involved also in programmes of trans-boundary research and monitoring.

**NGOs:** Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Conservationists in Námestovo, Polish Country Lovers' Society (PTTK) Spółka Karpaty in Nowy Sącz.

#### 4.3.3. History of cooperation

The cooperation of nature conservationists on both sides of the Babia Góra massif until 1989 was limited or even forbidden due to the political difficulties in Poland in the 1980s. Only in 1990, the cooperation in the field of nature conservation was initiated by the administration of the Horná Orava PLA. This initiative has found a positive response. In spite of this initiative, the mutual relationships and cooperation of Slovak and Polish nature conservationists remained informal, officially and legally not based and not planned. Therefore in 2001, both sides prepared draft agreement on cooperation. The "Agreement on Cooperation between the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Administration of Horná Orava PLA and Babiogorski Park Narodowy" was solemnly signed in Lipnica Wielka on 7 June 2002 on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the designation of Babia Góra to the network of the MaB Biosphere Reserves.

The purpose of this agreement is a mutual support and cooperation in nature conservation in the trans-boundary area of Babia Góra. Concrete long-term and short-term objectives and tasks for cooperation, relevant for the particular year are based in the protocol for implementation. Implementation of the protocol in the preceding year should be evaluated every year by 31 January.

#### 4.3.4. Topics of TBC

The main topics of cooperation between Administration of Horná Orava PLA and the BGNP are:

1. Cooperation in preparation of the proposal for the Polish-Slovak trans-boundary Biosphere Reserve Babia Góra/Babia Hora.
2. Cooperation in development of the strategy for nature conservation in the Polish-Slovak trans-border area of Babia Góra.
3. Cooperation in the research of biodiversity of Babia Góra.
4. Cooperation in international projects.
5. Mutual exchange of exhibitions, information and technical and scientific materials.

#### Forms and concrete activities of cooperation

- 1.a. Consultations and providing of data for elaboration of proposal for Babia Góra/Babia Hora Biosphere Reserve on the Slovak side
- 1.b. Commenting of the draft proposal for the Biosphere Reserve designation
- 2.a. Consultations in preparation of strategic materials in the field of nature conservation and use of Polish-Slovak trans-border area of Babia Góra
- 2.b. Providing of data and information in preparation of nature conservation strategic materials by both sides
- 3.c. Monitoring of numbers of visitors in Babia Hora National Nature Reserve and in a zone of strict protection of BPNP

- 4.a. Monitoring of fauna of Babia Góra with emphasis on rare and threatened species (*Tetrao urogallus*, *Lyrurus tetrrix*, *Aquila chrysaetos*, *Ursus arctos*, *Canis lupus*, *Lynx lynx*)
- 4.b. Monitoring of flora of Babia Góra with emphasis on rare and threatened species (*Salix herbacea*, *Diphasiastrum alpinum*, *Allium schoenoprasum* ssp. *alpinum*)
5. Inventory of occurrence and distribution of *Cerastium alpinum* ssp. *babiogorense*
6. Development of projects of environmental education
  - a) Project of a trans-border tourist trail Slaná voda – Babia Góra / Diablak – Markowe Sczawiny
  - b) Preparation of the joint activity “For a clean Babia Góra”
7. Providing of information on subjects of executed surveys and research
8. Mutual meetings (4-times per year) aimed at information exchange, consultations and defining of nature conservation challenges
9. Exchange of materials produced by both sides
10. Training of staff members of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (SNC) at Babia Góra NP and of staff members of Babia Góra NP at the SNC
11. Exchange of staff members of SNC and BPNP
12. Exchange of publications and access to bibliography

Particular tasks of the cooperation plan are continuously implemented and every year evaluated by both sides. In the framework of the plan of cooperation, the trans-border educational trail Slaná voda – Babia Hora – Markowe Sczawiny was realized and is maintained. Every year, a joint event for children and youth has been organised, connected with the cleaning of tourist trails on the Babia Góra massif, named “For a clean Babia Hora”. Several promotional materials and publications have been produced in the frame of the cooperation plan.

## Surface and biotic nature conservation

### I. Topic: Management plan and zoning

*Activity:* Harmonisation of management plans and zoning

*Results:* Overlapping of Horná Orava PLA with the proposed BR Babia Hora will be on 28 % of the area. The borders of the proposed BR Babia Hora are continuously interconnected with the borders of the existing BR Babia Góra on the Polish side. An approved management plan for the Horná Orava PLA will be the binding document for the development of the management plan for the Babia Hora/Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve.

The intended management plan for the Babia Hora/Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve will be a strategic document on the nature and landscape protection and sustainable use of the area of the Biosphere Reserve (ecological-functional segmentation of the area, prospective and operational goals, and practical measures, including deadlines and responsible persons and institutions). This management plan should include prospective and operational goals and practical measures, which will be harmonised in the planned BR Babia Hora on the Slovak side and the existing BR Babia Góra on the Polish side. Approved goals and measures in the management plan for the area of international importance will take precedence over approved goals and measures in the management plan for Horná Orava PLA in the respective area. The management plan for Babia Hora/Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve is prospected to be finalized by the end of 2008.

The future zones of the Horná Orava PLA and the proposed BR are harmonised with the zonation of the BGNP and Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve.

## II. Topic: Nature conservation and forest management

*Activity:* Near natural forest management practices and preservation of natural processes in forests of the core zone.

*Results:* Habitats conservation is provided in the core zone (fifth and highest level of protection). The "A" zone was designated to protect montane sub-alpine and alpine communities of the highest Flysch complex of the Western Carpathians.

The buffer zones B1 and B2, as well as the transitional zone C1 belong to Horná Orava PLA, which was established in 1978 and updated in 2003. The second and fourth level of protection is applied there. Buffer zone B1 is formed by spruce forest stands and the fourth level of protection (B - Babia Hora) and the third level of protection (C – Oravské Beskydy) is applied there. In the buffer zone B2 there is the fourth level of protection and it includes Tisovnica, Slaná voda and Rabčické bory. These zones were declared with the aim of conservation of forested and non-forested peatland of raised bogs and transitional type with some typical flora and fauna species. To conserve biodiversity of the important grasslands (semi-natural meadows and pastures), an inventory has been set up within the framework of a grassland vegetation mapping realised in cooperation with DAPHNE – Institute of Applied Ecology, Bratislava, Slovakia.

## III. Topic: Common BR

*Activity:* Establishment of trans-border BR Babia Góra/Babia Hora – preparation of the nomination form

*Results:* The nomination form was filled in after mutual consultations and sent to the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. The surface area of this proposed BR on the Slovak side is 19.994,2 ha, of which the core zone has the area of 503,9 ha (2,5 %), buffer zone 5.323,9 ha (26,6 %) and transitional zone 14.166,4 ha (70,9 %).

## IV. Topic: Grouse family birds

*Activity:* Monitoring of state and trends of population of capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) on Babia Hora

*Results:* A seminar on grouse family birds was organised in 2006 that aimed at presenting the newest knowledge on distribution and conservation of this group of birds and establishing a working group for their protection in the trans-border area of Babia Góra. Two joint field excursions were organised within the monitoring activity and numbers and distribution (occurrence) of capercaillie and black grouse on Babia Góra were specified.

## V. Topic: Natura 2000 and harmonisation of national ecological networks systems

*Activity:* Ensuring of continuity and harmonisation of Natura 2000 sites management on both sides of Babia Góra

*Results:* Babia Góra and its habitats on the Polish side were designated to the list of proposed Special Areas of Conservation under the name Babia Góra (PLH 120001) and on the Slovak side several sites with the names Babia Hora (SKUEV0190), Slaná Voda (SKUEV0190) and Rašeliniská Oravských Beskyd (Mires of Oravské Beskydy) (SKUEV0187). The same management principles are ensured in Babia Góra and Babia Hora Natura 2000 sites.

## VI. Topic: Large carnivores in trans-border habitats

*Activity:* Monitoring of large carnivores – brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and wolf (*Canis lupus*)

*Results:* A common census of large carnivores was realised in January 2003. The administrations of both protected areas informed each other about the occurrence and size of the population of the respective species. A residential individual brown bear, 2 groups of wolves and 5 individuals of lynx were registered in Babia Góra.

#### **VII. Topic: Threatened flora species**

*Activity:* Inventory of occurrence and distribution of *Cerastium alpinum* and development of plan for its protection and management.

*Results:* A survey of localities and a map of occurrence and distribution of the species were elaborated within this activity.

#### **VIII. Tourism and environmental education**

*Activity:* The activities of the BGNP administration include tourism, whereas the Horná Orava PLA administration's tourism activities are quite restricted. There have been no joint activities of the two PA administrations related to tourism issues in the past but the programme of Polish-Slovak cooperation includes activities related to tourism, visitor management and education.

#### **Environmental education and public awareness**

Environmental education and public awareness of both PAs address different target groups. Direct activities are focussed on primary pupils, students of secondary schools and universities, governmental authorities, specialised and non-governmental organisations (communal administration, fishers association, hunters association). The general public is addressed through regional media (public press and local public address system) in particular villages of the cross-border area of the region. Visitors of the area can learn about natural values of this region at the educational trails and the visitor centres. A new information centre about the Natura 2000 network is under construction in Ústie nad Priehradou near Oravská priehrada dam (Slovakia). In the frame of the project, two new visitor centres were established in Babia Góra NP. So far, the two PAs have not had a common programme for education and visitor information but visitor information has been issued in the two languages.

### **4.4 TBC in the frame of the project**

In the project preparation phase the selection of activities have been discussed and agreed with the cross-border partner, the Horna Orava Landscape Protected Area. Later during project implementation, stakeholders of the Slovak side have been involved only to a minor extent. Several individual people from Babia Hora took part at the Local Steering Committee meetings and in some of the project activities. Only two activities involved the participation of cross-border partners as an important aspect. However, the director of Horna Orava LPA can be considered as one of the main driving forces in this project concerning the cooperation of both protected areas.

The integration of the two trails that had been running parallel on Slovak and Polish side along the national border to the top of Babia Góra involved the consultation with the intergovernmental commission of transport, the Polish and Slovak boundary guards and the two protected areas which are responsible for the trail system in their territories. To reduce the impacts of hikers in the sensitive area of alpine and subalpine vegetation, the Polish part of the trail was closed and left to natural succession of the dwarf mountain pine scrub. The trail was remarked and equipped with information boards. A brochure in Polish and Slovak was published to explain the measure and also to disseminate information about the consequences of the coming into force of the Schengen agreement. As Poland and Slovakia joined the Schengen agreement in December 2007, the monitoring and control of tourist traffic along the border on the ridge is especially important, because the free border crossing can increase the impacts of tourism in the area.

The second activities including a trans-boundary aspect was the organisation of the Piotr Bobrowy Hike, an international event which mainly involves school children from the Polish and the Slovak side of the Babia Góra Mountains.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Factors of failure and success of TBC

#### 5.1.1. Obstacles for TBC

During the three-year project a number of main obstacles have been identified, which hinder TBC or make it at least difficult:

##### **Language barrier**

The problem with language barrier is especially valid for the Šumava BR where people on both sides of the border rarely speak the other country's language. New generations communicate more easily in English but still the language barrier hinders communication and cooperation especially of those stakeholders (municipalities, private sector) that have not developed linkages with cross-border partners yet. In the Gömör-Torna Karst area, Hungarian is a common language, nevertheless there are many people at the Slovakian side who do not understand Hungarian. Thus, initiatives of cooperation always need to be built in a bilingual context in order not to exclude the part of the Slovakian population that does not speak Hungarian. In Babia Góra, the language barrier is less important as Slovak and Polish are similar enough for basic communication. Anyhow, also in this region, it is important to consider bilingual communication for any kind of trans-boundary cooperation.

##### **Lack of communication**

The communication and educational activities of the protected areas, especially in Babia Góra but to certain extent also in Šumava and Aggtelek still do not consider the trans-boundary context. The websites and information material of the NPs only provide information about the own region and rarely visitors can obtain information of the cross-border area as a whole. Interlinkages between communication programmes of the PAs are limited and joint strategies of communication are still lacking. Such lacks also persist regarding local transport and local culture. Joint solutions for sustainable transportation, cross-border events for local communities and visitors and commonly organised cultural programmes are still rare. The project has initiated considerable progress within this field in Šumava and Aggtelek BR (see below).

##### **Lack of integrated strategic regional planning**

In all three regions, the coexistence of two (or more) parallel planning processes at both side of the border that have not been integrated, has been a major obstacle for the implementation of trans-boundary initiatives. All activities realised by the PAs need to comply with the management plans of the parks, and differences between these plans hindered joint measures and implementation. Due to the very different history, structure and praxis of nature conservation management in the different countries, the realisation of joint management planning will be a major challenge in the future. Nevertheless, in all three regions, there is a common vision and the strong will to work towards joint regional planning, not only for the PAs but also for the whole region. The initiatives that have been fostered during the project - in Babia Góra, the future trans-boundary BR, in Aggtelek the trans-boundary DMO and in Šumava the implementation of a joint project on tourism management planning - will contribute to the efforts of putting common regional planning into practice.

### **Weakness of the private sector and the civil society (NGOs)**

The economic conditions of the BRs - remote rural areas with lacks of infrastructure, trends of depopulation and only few possibilities of development - also cause a weakness of the institutional organising of the private sector and the civil society. This is especially valid for Aggtelek and Babia Góra BR where the private tourism sector is weak and no tourism association or DMO exists that could engage in trans-boundary cooperation. The same is true for the Slovak counterparts of the two BRs. In Šumava, the situation is different, and the commercial sector is in many ways advanced regarding its trans-boundary activities compared to the PAs and the public sector. The same is true for the NGOs - while in Babia Góra and Aggtelek small NGOs have no sufficient capacities to initiate cross-border activities, in Šumava there are already good relationship between NGOs that cooperate on a regular basis.

### **Border regulations**

In socialistic times, the three state borders relevant for the project - all between countries that at that time were part of the Warsaw Pact - formed impenetrable boundaries that disabled any kind of trans-boundary relations. After the fall of the communist regimes, border crossing restriction were eased and people in all three countries were free to cross borders at any time. Nevertheless, in practice, border regulations continued to hinder trans-boundary cooperation as described for the Aggtelek BR where border had been closed during the night until 2008. Strict interpretation of competent jurisdiction together with a legal framework that didn't allow for joint action also hindered attempts to find common solutions for nature conservation issues as described for the case of the parallel Slovak/Polish trail in Babia Góra.

Fortunately, with the coming into force of the Schengen agreement, these obstacles have been eliminated in 2007. However, the new situation - free border crossing for pedestrians, cyclers and horse riders anywhere - also calls for new management solutions regarding the sensitive habitats that have been maintained along the state borders *thanks* to the restrictions of former times. In all three BRs, efforts have been made already to react to this new situation and to communicate to the visitors of the PA that the Schengen agreement does not mean that restrictions valid in the conservation zones of the national parks have been abolished.

### **5.1.2. Factors of success**

The project demonstrated various factors that contribute positively to the enhancement of trans-boundary cooperation:

#### **Institutional framework and political support**

Generally, the institutional framework of the PAs favours initiatives for trans-boundary cooperation. Furthermore, the political level supports such initiatives as the governments recognize the need and value of cooperation with their neighbour states. Thanks to their understanding of ecological processes and the experiences of their daily work in the trans-boundary areas, nature conservation managers in general have positive attitude towards cooperation with the cross-border partner. When it comes to practical implementation, however, often the institutional management structures lack opportunities for common approaches and PA administrators' influence is restricted to their own territory. Therefore, trans-boundary cooperation is still limited to individual joint activities and singular projects but lacks a common overall framework. Intergovernmental agreements have to enable not only these individual activities but adjust the general framework of nature conservation management to make joint management of the trans-boundary partners possible.

### **Funding opportunities and demand for trans-boundary cooperation for fund application**

Within the EU's strategic programming, trans-boundary cooperation is considered as necessary and valuable approach, and many funding opportunities call for action in this sphere. The possibility to obtain resources can serve as a motivation for partners on both side of the border to engage in such activities. Vice versa, applications related to a border area that do not integrate trans-boundary activities have less chance to be considered for support.

### **Historic relationships and tradition of cooperation**

Despite the language barrier, all three regions have a common history and a long tradition of relationship. New initiatives can build upon these traditions, recalling and revitalising the common culture. However, it is a process of decades rather than years to erase the "border in the people's head" and to install a self-identification with the whole transboundary region.

### **Positive attitude of leading organisations of regional development**

The most important organisations that are the driving force for regional development in the three region - the ŠRDA in Šumava, the AGN in Aggtelek, and, to a more limited extent, the BGNP in Babia Góra, all favour the enhancement of trans-boundary cooperation and are willing (and some of them already experienced) to invest resources in this field.

### **Real life experience**

While intergovernmental agreements and political action in terms of adjusting the legal and institutional framework in a way that fosters trans-boundary activities are important, the more significant contribution comes from the implementation of concrete small-scale projects that involve stakeholders from the very local level. These provide opportunities for people to meet each other and exchange ideas, and thus build the ground of mutual trust and relationship that is needed to put all the high-level strategies and plans into action. The personal engagement and involvement of the local population is easiest initiated via such projects - e.g. a common cultural festival, a new trail to be built together or a joint training programme. The personal experience of people that participated in such small project will then contribute to the efficiency of the practical implementation of the more general strategies and goals of transboundary cooperation developed at a higher political or institutional level.

## **5.2 The impact of the project on TBC**

From the outputs of this study and the experiences made in the project, it can be concluded that the project was successful in fostering the TBC in Šumava and Aggtelek, and that these achievements were mainly related to the work of the protected areas. Regarding the cooperation of other stakeholders such as municipalities, NGOs and the private sector, the project could not reach the ambitious goal of significantly impacting the progress of this cooperation. In Babia Góra, the project could not reach an involvement of cross-border partners to a similar extend as in the other two BRs.

The situation of TBC and prospects for its development in the future are surely better today in all three regions compared to the beginning of the project. Anyhow, it is hard to say how much the project contributed to this positive development.



While in the other two project areas the cooperation with the trans-boundary partners could be realised from the beginning of the project and stakeholders from both side have been involved in many project activities, in Babia Góra the project did not reach the expected degree in trans-boundary cooperation, especially of stakeholders that do not belong to the PAs or the village associations. The good cooperation and the different initiatives and activities of TBC in the Babia Góra/Babia Hora region existed prior to the project, as well as the main idea of establishing a trans-boundary biosphere reserve. The Polish project team did not have the capacity to take this favourable background as an opportunity to implement the project in a trans-boundary context which would have been possible for most of the activities.

Regarding the development of the tourism management plans for the biosphere reserves - the main activity of the project - in Aggtelek and Šumava, a consultation with the trans-boundary partners as well as the notification of the general public in the cross-border area during the whole process of TMP development could be realised, which was not the case in Babia Góra.

In Aggtelek, Slovak stakeholders participated actively in the TMP development as well as in other project activities and therefore, the project really could make a meaningful contribution to the further progress of TBC. One of the other big activities in Aggtelek, the Gömör-Torna Festival, has been designed as a trans-boundary action and played a crucial role for the enhancement of the cooperation. Smaller activities were carried out with the participation of Slovak stakeholders and outputs of many of the activities were shared with the Slovak side, including the publication of material in Slovak language.

In Šumava, despite the fact that stakeholders from the German side were not directly involved in the TMP development process, the trans-boundary partners are highly interested in further cooperation regarding tourism issues which they would like to base on the new tourism strategy for Šumava - a project application to support the joint implementation of tourism management is already on the way. For the preparation of the training of guide, the Šumava project team took the opportunity to learn from the German side and the participation of German trainees in the programme could be realised. Of special importance was the activity related to the trans-boundary trail system where the Šumava team closely cooperated with partners from Germany and Austria. This cooperation within the frame of a concrete, small activity also helped to foster the discussion of the framework of trans-boundary cooperation in general.

In Aggtelek and Šumava, the project as a whole with its many opportunities for meetings, official and unofficial contacts and mutual invitations, as well as individual activities focusing on specific tasks which were not too difficult to complete and which were implemented in close cooperation with trans-boundary partners contributed significantly to the enhancement of trans-boundary cooperation and resulted in two major achievements:

- In Aggtelek, the future DMO is planned to be established as a trans-boundary organisation right from the start.
- In Šumava, the partners are developing joint projects on sustainable tourism development for the whole region, taking the Šumava tourism strategy developed within the project as a starting point.

In Babia Góra, the project team concentrated mainly on the territory of the BR / the three municipalities that form the BR, Jablonka, Lipnica Wielka and Zawoja. Overcoming the traditional separation of the two sides of the mountain - the northern side with Zawoja, and the southern side with Jablonka and Lipnica Wielka, (both in Poland) already represented a challenge for the project. Even more difficult proved to be the attempt to place the whole project into a trans-boundary context. Only a few of the activities in Babia Góra were planned taking trans-boundary aspects into consideration, and most of the contacts with cross-border partners during the three years of the project were not seen as a part of the project, regardless whether they were related to

project activities or not. Only the integration of the two trails has been considered as a cross-border initiative where Slovakian partners were involved in order to achieve the activity's objective.

The reasons for the reservation of the Polish project team towards active engagement in TBC during the implementation of the project are manifold:

The main project partner, the Friends of Babia Góra Association, is a small NGO which did not have the capacities to foster regional cooperation processes or to be the lead partner in such a process. Furthermore, the management of the project has received insufficient support in terms of resources and ideological support from the CPEA and therefore had to concentrate very strictly on the achievements of basic project objectives. "Soft goals" like the enhancement of trans-boundary cooperation, were formulated for the project, but not equipped with indicators, concrete activities and budget lines and thus played a minor role in the project management's daily work.

Second, in Babia Góra, the responsibilities for the implementation of the numerous project activities were distributed among a range of local stakeholders (municipalities, state forest administrations, a district government, an NGO, a museum, the high school of tourism, the CPEA and the national park). On the one hand this was a big advantage as the realisation of the small individual activities was a clear goal and mostly easy to achieve for the owner of the activity. On the other hand, this structure resulted in some lacks within the overall implementation and the loss of overview and interlinkages of the different activities. This affected also the objective of fostering the trans-boundary cooperation as there was nobody which felt primarily responsible for it.

Third, the experiences of the past and the difficult transition from former socialist, centralized structures to democratic, decentralized ones, which took place also in the field of nature protection, is still impacting the work of the PAs and communal administrations. Staff members of protected areas are not allowed to initiate cooperation without approval from higher political level, and the allocation of budgets to such activities is not seen as a useful part of the work of the PA, despite all the efforts of establishing the Euregion, the Slovak-Polish cooperation programme etc. Whenever the PAs are entitled to engage in concrete trans-boundary activities such as the joint monitoring of large carnivores, cooperation seems to be running smoothly, and in comparison with the other two BRs, the language is not a barrier in the case of Babia Góra and its Slovak neighbour (Polish and Slovak are similar enough to enable mutual comprehension). Against this background, the trans-boundary aspects have not been given sufficient recognition by the main project partners.

Nevertheless, the trans-boundary cooperation of the Polish and Slovak side of Babia Góra is good, prospering and will be much more enhanced in the future when the trans-boundary biosphere reserve will be established. The project surely fostered this idea, also on the Slovak side, through demonstrating the usefulness of the BR concept and pointing out important issues of cooperation, above all, in tourism management, such as visitor and impact monitoring and management, marketing and promotion, certification of sound tourism products and services, and support of local culture and traditions.

### 5.3 Recommendations: Priorities for the future

The following priorities for future action to bring forward efficient and effective trans-boundary cooperation have been identified in the course of the project:

- the establishment of common (cross-border) destination management organisations
- the design of future projects as cross-border projects
- the valorisation of cooperation of municipalities within the frame of Euroregions

- the intensification of the PAs' joint programmes in the field of tourism such as training, educational programmes, visitor information, certification of tourism products and services etc.
- the establishment of common nature protection management planning of the PAs, including a joint tourism management (and development) concept
- the building of a common vision and a common image for the trans-boundary areas, in terms of tourism marketing as well as in terms of the self-identification of the region's population
- the integration of biodiversity conservation issues in all kinds of trans-boundary cooperation agreements and actions not only in the PA's management but also for public and private sector initiatives
- the enhancement of private sector's initiatives and the intensification of the cooperation between PAs, public administration and the private sector, above all, the tourism business in the field of trans-boundary cooperation
- the recognition of the importance of small-scale projects related to practical issues and opportunities of exchange for the general public
- the further promotion of the establishment of true trans-boundary PAs/BRs.

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### Aggteleki Nemzeti Park

Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve and National Park is situated in a vast karst area which belongs to the southern limestone foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, at the northern frontier of Hungary with the Slovak Republic.

### Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve and National Park

Tengerszem oldal 1  
H-3758 Jószafo  
Hungary  
tel (+36-48) 506-000  
fax (+36-48) 506-001  
info.anp@t-online.hu  
www.anp.hu



### Babiogórski Park Narodowy

Babia Góra is the highest massif in the West Beskidy mountains which form part of the Western Carpathians, situated in the Southwest of Poland at the frontier with the Slovak Republic. With a peak of 1725 m, Babia Góra is a perfect example of plants zonation in European mountains.

### Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve and National Park

Zawoja 1403  
34-223 Zawoja  
Poland  
tel (+33) 877 51 10  
fax (+33) 877 55 54  
park@bgpn.pl  
www.bgpn.pl



### Správa Národního Parku Šumava

The Biosphere Reserve and National Park in the Šumava mountain range, situated along the southwest borders of the Czech Republic with Germany and Austria, covers a great variety of precious natural habitats, including remnants of primeval mountain forests, glacial lakes and extensive peat lands.

### Šumava Biosphere Reserve and National Park

I. máje 260  
385 01 Vimperk  
Czech Republic  
tel (+420) 388 450 111  
fax (+420) 388 413 019  
vimperk@npšumava.cz  
www.npšumava.cz



### Ökológiai Intézet a Fenntartható Fejlődésért Alapítvány

The Institute, founded in 1992, aims to promote the idea of sustainable development by building understanding on the idea of sustainability and helping the practical implementation of sustainable development.

### Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development

Kossuth u. 13  
H-3525 Miskolc  
Hungary  
tel (+36) 46 505 768  
fax (+36) 46 505 768  
iroda@ecolinst.hu  
www.ecolinst.hu



### Stowarzyszenie Przyjaciele Babiej Góry

The main goal of the Friends of Babia Góra Association is to support sustainable development of local communities living around Babia Góra through the development of the economic sector with simultaneous protection of its rich natural and cultural heritage.

### Friends of Babia Góra

Zubrzyca Góra 325  
34-484 Zubrzyca Góra  
Poland  
tel (+48) 18 2852384  
fax (+48) 18 2647512



### Ústav systémové biologie a ekologie, Akademie věd České republiky

The Institute, established in 1993, focuses on dynamic properties of biological and ecological systems at various hierarchical levels, from molecules to landscape. Scientific research and graduate education are its primary activities.

### Institute of Systems Biology and Ecology

Na Sádkách 7  
370 05 České Budějovice  
Czech Republic  
tel (+420) 387775623  
fac (+420) 385310249  
usbe@usbe.cas.cz  
www.usbe.cas.cz



### Ökologischer Tourismus in Europa (Ö.T.E.) e. V.

The society, founded 1991, offers information and education about environmentally friendly forms of tourism. It carries out regional model projects designed to promote sustainable tourism as an element of sustainable regional development.

### Ecological Tourism in Europe

Am Michaelshof 8-10  
D-53177 Bonn  
Germany  
tel (+49) 228 359 008  
fax (+49) 228 359 096  
info@oete.de  
www.oete.de